SCRIPTURE

THE ONLY GUIDE TO

RELIGIOUS TRUTH,

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.

BRITISH MUSEUM

SCRIPTURE
THE ONLY GUIDE TO RELIGIOUS TRUTH.

A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SOCIETY OF BAPTISTS

In YORK,

IN RELINQUISHING THE

POPULAR SYSTEMS OF RELIGION,

FROM THE

STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A BRIEF ACCOUNT

Of their present VIEWS of the

FAITH AND PRACTICE OF THE GOSPEL.

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

BY D. EATON.

"But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect we know that every where it is spoken against."——ACTS xxviii. 22.

YORK:

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PREFACE.

IT may be expected that ſome reaſons ſhould be given for preſenting the following pages to the Public, eſpecially as it is known by many that, at one period, we were not the moſt friendly to publications on Religion. This aroſe from the certain knowledge we had gained by experience, as well as obſervation, that a very improper uſe is too often made of them, and from thinking that a ſimple honeſt attention to the ſcriptures would anſwer every beneficial purpoſe; for it is evident that great numbers of religious people, of certain deſcriptions, do in fact, though not in profeſſion, ſeek more for a knowledge of their ſtate, and more for aſſiſtance and aſſurance of their ſafety from the writings and experience of men, than they do from the ſcriptures. Neither is this to be wondered at, when we conſider their ideas of the depravity of their nature, and that the ſcriptures cannot be underſtood without ſupernatural aſſiſtance. However, we can aſſure the Reader that theſe Letters were originally written at the earneſt requeſt of a Friend, without any determinate idea of publiſhing them. Since they were finiſhed, a number of reaſons preſented themſelves which have induced us to make them public. We have been groſsly miſrepreſented. We have been made to ſpeak ſentiments which we do not believe. We have been conſidered as enemies to religion, almoſt without a hearing. It has been thought that we deny the uſe of prayer and the work of the Spirit; that we have no experience, are contrary to all men, and maintain that none will be ſaved but ourſelves, &c. That every ſituation has its

own experience is evident to any man who knows any thing. That one ſituation has not the experience of another, is nothing to the purpoſe. A doctrine in its own nature is either true or falſe, independent of the experience either of its friends or enemies. Therefore this objection is too weak to require any farther notice. That none will be ſaved but ourſelves, is a ſentiment far too ſtrong to be maintained by any fallible men, however right their views may be. This attaches too much merit to mere opinions, and is only inſiſted upon againſt us for want of better arguments. What any man's final ſituation will be, we leave to "the Judge of all the earth, who will do right." Without going thus far, we nevertheleſs do not heſitate to pronounce falſhood to be falſhood, and to maintain error to be error, whatever the conſequence of it may be. If a man through blind prejudice, or intereſted views, hardens his mind againſt conviction, and is nearly determined to be nothing but what he is, right or wrong, or if he from any worldly motives whatever ſcrupulouſly avoids all inquiry, and will not exerciſe his mind upon what is truth, "that man ſhall bear his own burden, whoſoever he be."

It is true we do moſt poſitively deny that ſinners are ever taught to pray for faith as a gift, or for the influences of the Spirit to work in them any ſuch work, as will be ſeen more at large in the following pages. We there have ſcripturally conſidered the ſubject, and given our reaſons for what we ſay. If in our interpretations we have given the plain ſenſe of the ſcriptures alluded to, then the doctrines of Original Sin, the Work of the Spirit, that Faith is the Gift of God, Election and Reprobation, the Satisfaction of Chriſt, and the Trinity, according to the common ideas, all of courſe fall to the ground. This is no trifle nor mere matter of diſtinction, nor is it to be regarded as ſuch; but it is entirely a different ſyſtem, an oppoſite view of things; and if what is here premiſed be true, all

the ſcriptures brought to ſupport theſe doctrines are miſapplied, the true ſenſe of every text employed for this purpoſe is perverted. To be at all conſiſtent, this is the only concluſion to which we can come; a concluſion that will equally apply to either ſide on which the truth may be found.

Should any perſon attempt to refute what is here advanced, if he can ſhew it to be irrational or unſcriptural he will have our ſincere thanks, he will be attended to in the moſt reſpectful manner, and have every acknowledgment made which he can deſire. We ſeek only for truth. We have little honour to loſe in the ſcale of things, and for motives of intereſt we have none to blunt the edge of conviction. Our own hands conſtantly miniſter to our own neceſſities, therefore in our ſituation there is little to hinder any argument that is really ſubſtantial from being impartially examined. We are fully perſuaded that candid diſcuſſion is always friendly to truth. But we cannot conſider ourſelves anſwered by ridicule, or by firſt miſrepreſenting facts, and then drawing concluſions, a practice by much too common amongſt Diſputants on Religion; nor will it at all help the matter to ſay that the doctrines here objected to have been ſanctioned by time and numbers, and by learned men. No length of time can ſanctify error, or convert it into truth, nor can any arguments from numbers be conſidered as concluſive; they can be uſed to ſupport a lie as well as truth, and can be produced with much better effect by a Mahometan than a Chriſtian. We want nothing but the plain ſenſe of the ſcriptures, and no argument whatever, which is not ſupported by their authority, will bring conviction to the reflecting mind.

As it is impoſſible that we ſhould have the leaſt claim to literary merit, being deſtitute of every requiſite for ſuch pretenſions, learned criticiſms, however juſt, cannot affect us, becauſe we have no means of judging of them. Ignorant as we

are of the rules of compoſition, this ſmall work was compoſed after the manual labours of the day, principally in thoſe hours which Nature has allotted to reſt. To us it appeared of great importance, and that thought enabled us to ſurmount all difficulties, and we are not without ſome hopes of its doing ſome good. However, we have uſed our beſt endeavours to be underſtood; if we have ſucceeded here, our principal intention is gained.

YORK, *Goodramgate*,
Sept. 30, 1799.

LETTER I.

DEAR FRIEND,

IN compliance with your requeſt, ſome time ago, that we would give you, in writing, an account of the origin, progreſs, and eſtabliſhment of the Baptiſt Church in the City of York, after this interval of time we have prevailed on ourſelves, however ill ſuited our abilities may be to the undertaking, to give, as well as we can, a plain and ſimple account of the various proceſſes through which we have gone, previous to our ſettling in our preſent views, together with ſome of the principal reaſons that have induced us to differ from others. To a mind enlightened by truth, and in love with rational principles, the peruſal will not be found unintereſting, eſpecially if it has been bewildered in the ſame dreary path, and duly conſiders the character and ſituation of the people about to be deſcribed.

Figure to yourſelf a number of plain illiterate perſons without learning, or any of the advantages of an improved education; moſt of them in the loweſt ſtations of life; journeymen, mechanics, with one or two exceptions, thus ſituated in the maſs of ſociety, and, of courſe, heirs to the prejudices and habits of thought which prevail there, but who, notwithſtanding the influence of rooted

tradition, and that powerful bias in favor of what is eſtabliſhed by authority, by learning, and the ſanction of ages, ſo natural to the human mind, yet have by an unwearied purſuit of rational truth, without any patronage, and unaſſiſted by any pilot to guide them in the ſtorm of oppoſition and perplexity, overcome every difficulty, and have now, after ſuffering much odium and contempt, reſted on the immoveable baſis of reaſon and truth, and you will then ſee the ſubſtance of their proceedings.

While we implicitly receive all that we are taught, notwithſtanding the folly and falſhood which may prevail, there is no chance of any improvement, and it is no wonder if opinions are impoſed upon us that have neither ſcripture nor common ſenſe for their ſupport; yet ſo averſe are people of all ranks to change any ſentiment of which they have been accuſtomed to think well, that it is a work of the greateſt difficulty to perſuade them to examine into the propriety of what they believe and attend to in religious matters; and though the fatal effects of this conduct have been ſeen in the ages that are paſt, when the errors of Popery univerſally prevailed, yet people now as much take things upon truſt, and as much depend upon others, as if no ſuch evil had ever exiſted. From a ſurvey of mankind, in this reſpect, the truth in a great meaſure ſeems to be this, that Chriſtianity in ſome form or other being eſtabliſhed in theſe parts of the world, we are born, as it were, to the profeſſion of it of courſe, and though it is obvious, from the oppoſite and contradictory ſyſtems that are built upon it, that error and

darkneſs greatly prevail, yet without the leaſt enquiry we receive our fathers' creed, and think we ſufficiently ſhew our zeal for truth, by tenaciouſly ſupporting the religion to which we were born, not conſidering that, by the ſame rule of conduct, had we ſprung from Jewiſh parents, we ſhould have been Jews; or had we entered upon life in Spain or Italy, we ſhould have been Catholicks; or in Turkey, Mahometans; and ſhould have equally prided ourſelves on ſupporting the religion to which we were born—the religion of our fathers: but when people are ſo active and inquiſitive in almoſt all the ordinary concerns of life, where can lie the merit of this implicit faith, or this paſſive conduct, in matters of religion? a ſubject which on all hands is allowed to be of the very laſt importance to our preſent peace of mind, and our future well-being, and yet without the leaſt heſitation we truſt to others the concerns of eternity, when we would not ſuffer them to diſpoſe of a few pounds of our money without a proper examination. Theſe remarks ſeem to us ſo plain and ſtriking that any perſon with the leaſt attention muſt feel their force.

But however general this want of enquiry into the truth of doctrines may be, there are, nevertheleſs, ſome remarkable exceptions, and perhaps few that are more ſtriking than that of the people whoſe religious hiſtory we are now about to give.

Without ſtopping to make more remarks, we ſhall begin our account by obſerving that we were originally of the Eſtabliſhed Church, and that we became ſerious pretty early in life, ſome

by one means, and ſome by another. We alternately attended Churches and Chapels in all their frequent and varied means of inſtruction, but principally confined our attention to the preaching of the Methodiſts, and though their name then was not ſo honourable as it is now, yet, regardleſs of all conſequences of this ſort, with great induſtry and the beſt intentions we endeavoured to reach to all the great attainments and poſſeſſions that their ſyſtem holds out, rightly judging that the knowledge of the love of God, and the enjoyment of truth, are the greateſt of all human bleſſings. Indeed all parties equally hold out this good to their adherents; happineſs here, and happineſs hereafter, is the end they all have in view, however they may differ, and however ill adapted the means they inſiſt upon may be for its attainment; and as we ſincerely deſire not to miſrepreſent any man's views, we ſhall ſtate the leading features of the ſyſtems to which we attended.

The Methodiſts, as well as the Calviniſts, maintain that we are conceived in ſin and ſhapen in iniquity, in the moſt literal ſenſe; that we come into exiſtence with a nature totally depraved, and that the ſoul is ſo polluted by original ſin and inbred guilt, that man naturally is unable to do a good work, or even to think a good thought, and in this loſt and corrupt ſituation the pure law of a pure God calls aloud for pure obedience, and threatens, in the moſt unconditional manner, the ſoul that ſinneth with death, and filleth it with fear and trembling, and the moſt awful apprehenſions; that the ſentence of the law ſeizes upon our guilty conſcience, and makes it a remembrancer

unto us, in whoſe ample ſtore-houſe is laid up all the ſins of our youth, and of all our follies, and that when our minds are awakened, it brings them all back upon us with double force, echoing through the miſerable ſoul the wrath of an angry God, and the ſentence of eternal damnation.

In this ſituation, no man can help his fellow, nor even his own ſoul: here all the ſtrength of man is perfect weakneſs, there is no eſcape, no place of refuge, but in the grace and mercy of God, manifeſted in the goſpel, or in the blood and righteouſneſs of the atoning Lamb.

Under this gracious diſpenſation, it is believed all are invited to come and take of the water of life freely. The Lord Jeſus is repreſented as ſtanding with open arms, inviting guilty ſinners to come and partake of the benefits of his death and ſufferings, aſſuring them that he died that they might live, that he paid the debt due to ſin, and ſatisfied divine juſtice, and now all that come unto him he will in no wiſe caſt out; that they muſt come unto him by faith, entirely ſtripped of all dependence on their own righteouſneſs and good works, ſolely relying on the meritorious blood of the croſs, on that acceptable ſacrifice that Chriſt offered when he offered himſelf without ſpot unto God, and by which he purchaſed eternal redemption for them: and farther, that that divine faith which ſaves the ſoul is the gift of God, and is wrought or implanted in the ſoul by the operation of the ſpirit, by the previous internal workings of which man is made to ſee his loſt condition by nature, and his need of a Saviour; that it diſcovers to the ſinner his ignorance, and the deceitfulneſs of his own heart works in him conviction,

repentance, and that holy confidence which enables him to ſay, that he is paſſed from death unto life; that gives him to feel the regenerating influence of the holy ſpirit, ſpeaking peace to his wounded conſcience through the application of the precious blood of Chriſt, which cleanſeth from all ſin.

By this inward evidence he is aſſured of the pardon of his ſins, and his intereſt in the love of God: he is now born again, becomes a new man, leads a life of faith above the fleſh, and has his affections placed on high, where Chriſt ſitteth at the right hand of God; and that this faith and evidence, which is productive of ſuch happy effects, is to be obtained by attending on the means of preaching, praying, ſeeking, &c. &c.

This, and much more that might be ſaid to the ſame purpoſe, includes the leading ideas of the Methodiſts. Theſe ſentiments were by us cordially believed, and we had no doubt of them that they were the peculiar doctrines of Chriſtianity, and that could we only acquire the poſſeſſion of them, of this work, and witneſs of the ſpirit, we ſhould then attain the ſummit of all our wiſhes.

For this we attended meetings and ſacraments; for this we faſted and prayed to God that he would be graciouſly pleaſed to ſave us, and bleſs us with the knowledge of his truth; that he would work in us true and ſaving faith; that he would give us to ſee the merit, and know our intereſt in the blood of a crucified Redeemer, and were ſeriouſly diſpoſed not to deſiſt till, by happy experience, we ſenſibly knew that Chriſt loved us and died for us.

In purſuing this great end, we met with various ſucceſs, ſometimes full of the moſt pleaſing hopes, and ſometimes of the moſt haraſſing and perplexing fears; and, in the mean-time, we were diligent in attending upon Preachings, Claſs Meetings, Prayer Meetings, &c. &c. as well as the moſt earneſt ſupplication in private.

In the courſe of our attendance upon theſe means, we were, at times, elevated to an high degree, which led us to think we were near being made happy, and that God was now working in us all the good pleaſure of his will; but the ſtrength of theſe feelings ſoon failed us, and we were led to conclude, they were only momentary impulſes, the unavailing effects of our own exertions, and with no ſmall degree of dejection we believed we were yet unregenerated, and of courſe expoſed to the wrath of God. This unſettled ſtate of mind was productive of many uneaſy days and wearieſome nights, and nothing was ſo much longed for as the happy time when we ſhould be delivered from the bondage of ſin, and be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Thus unpleaſantly circumſtanced, we went on till the time came, when, as we thought, we had attained all we ſought for, viz. the aſſurance of faith, the witneſs of the ſpirit witneſſing with our ſpirits that we were the children of God, and had a ſaving intereſt in his love.

Nothing now but heaven and happineſs engaged our thoughts, and we moſt ardently wiſhed that all mankind knew and enjoyed the ſame bleſſedneſs.

Our hearts were now filled with gladneſs, and our countenances wore a ſmile of joy; our mouths were full of praiſe, and we ſoared on the wings of hope. We ſaw, or thought we ſaw, ſo much of the world to come, that we were in a great meaſure reſigned either to live or die, to be any thing or nothing, as it ſhould pleaſe God. But this ſeaſon of gladneſs was not of very long continuance: our extatic frames began to fail us; our glowing ſenſations loſt their fervency and cooled, inſomuch that, notwithſtanding all our efforts, which were not few, we were again filled with doubts, and began to fear we had been deceived, or that we had grieved the holy ſpirit, and that he had withdrawn his preſence from us.

Theſe things naturally led us to apply to the Preachers and others for inſtructions and aſſiſtance in this caſe, for they, as is uſual, had congratulated us on our happineſs in being ſet at liberty, in having the evidence of the forgiveneſs of our ſins, &c. They aſſured us it was nothing uncommon for perſons, in our ſituation, to be thus exerciſed, that God frequently tried his people, and proved them by different ways; and farther, that the enemy of ſouls would take every opportunity of filling our minds with evil thoughts, and thereby rob us of our joy, or that we had been ſo much elated as to ſlacken in our attention upon the means; but that, by and by, we ſhould ſoon feel ourſelves renewed, and again enjoy the light of his countenance.

In theſe caſes, likewiſe, we took to the reading of the ſcriptures for aſſiſtance; but here we were not ſo ſucceſsful as we could have wiſhed, for we

unfortunately read them with the idea already fixed in us, that they were a ſealed book, and that we could not underſtand them except the ſpirit opened and applied them to our minds, ſo that from them we derived little advantage. We were then led to read the lives and experience of thoſe who were eſteemed good men, of their trials and their triumphs, how they lived and how they died. Here we felt ourſelves greatly intereſted, and often read with much pleaſure and ſatisfaction, for in them we ſaw our own likeneſs, our own experience, and thence took courage. Thus we went on for years, till we came to be not a whit behind the chiefeſt of our brethren. Although we now ſomewhat aſſumed a different appearance, and talked in the language of confidence and aſſurance, and continued to do ſo for a conſiderable time, yet we frequently had our ſecret miſgivings that all was not right from the fluctuating ſtate of our experience.

This led us to examine more into the truth of the opinions we had adopted, the reſult of which was a diſſatisfaction with ſome of our views, and with our ſituation as members of the Eſtabliſhed Church. Though for the preſent we found little fault with the doctrines, yet we thought that her practice and diſcipline were ſtrangely degenerated into a ſource of corruption.

We perceived that the cure of ſouls was bartered and bargained for at the expence of better principles; that it was little more than a trade, a ſyſtem of revenue and power, where men did not enter upon the Miniſterial character as being pre-

viouſly men of enlightened underſtandings, and eminently diſtinguiſhed for a ſerious adherence to religious principle, but that too often perſons of immoral character, and otherwiſe unfit for the diſcharge of the moſt important duties, were preferred through the patronage of great men, or the influence of friends, from the ſecondary conſideration of providing for themſelves and their families.

When Religion is viewed in its purity and importance, when it is conſidered that its concerns extend beyond the perſonal intereſts of this life, conſequently that all its ſervices and ordinances ſhould be adminiſtred with reverence and uprightneſs, it cannot but affect the ſerious mind to ſee a man, whoſe improper conduct both as a man and a miniſter is notorious, with an hypocritical ſanctity adminiſter the ſymbols of the death and ſufferings of Chriſt. Is it to be wondered at if ſuch perſons are not particular in their inquiries into the conduct of their communicants, or that they ſhould be at little pains to preſs their pariſhioners to purity of principle and deportment? Theſe bad examples, in ſuch characters, tend too much to fix in the minds of the people a diſtaſte for their whole order, or a belief that an attention upon ceremonies will ſupply the defects of moral principle and virtuous conduct.

Another conſideration that tended greatly to leſſen our attachment to the Eſtabliſhed Church was, that in her ample incloſure all are conſidered as Chriſtians, independent of their principles and conduct, thus making a certain form of Church government, and extent of territory the conſti-

tuent parts of Chriſtianity, inſtead of the belief and practice of the goſpel.

The articles of the Church (not, as it appears to us, very conſiſtently with her government) make repentance, faith, and a change of heart and of conduct neceſſary for ſalvation. But when men come into a ſtate of death, ready to be depoſited in the grave, whether they in their life time were believers or unbelievers, righteous or unrighteous, the Miniſter thanks God for receiving the ſoul of their dearly-beloved brethren departed, &c. and commits their bodies to the duſt, in ſure and certain hope of a glorious reſurrection.

This practice either is indefenſible and ſtands for nothing at all, or the way that leadeth unto life is juſt the reverſe of what the ſcripture repreſents it. If men can follow the moſt licentious and abandoned principles, riot in vice and iniquity, be traffickers in human blood, and violators of every moral duty, Deiſts, or Atheiſts, and ſtill be conſidered dearly-beloved brethren departed, then the way that leadeth unto life is a broad way indeed, and many go in thereat. When we ſay that theſe things ſtruck us as groſs abſurdities, or as ſomething worſe, we think we run no danger of incurring the charge of ſingularity from ſober, enlightened people; beſides, the doctrines of the Church appeared to us to be Calviniſtic, a ſcheme to which we were, at that time, rather inclined; but the idea of Eſtabliſhed Churches conſidering all the inhabitants of the countries under their government as Chriſtians indiſcriminately, appeared to us contrary to the genius and ſpirit of Calviniſm, for,

in that caſe, inſtead of the elect number, or choſen few, we ſhould ſee elect nations without any regard to moral appearances, an idea than which nothing is more contradictory to the Calviniſtic ſcheme. Theſe, and a number of other things, upon which it is very unpleaſant to dwell, made us very uneaſy with our condition as Churchmen, and finally led us to bear another character.

One of the ſtrongeſt reaſons which induced us to leave the Methodiſts and become Independent Calviniſts, was the very great difference that exiſted between our general principles and what we obſerved to take place in the world; for nothing was clearer to us than that all men had not ſaving faith, and as we, with others, conſidered human nature as ſo depraved that man could not believe of himſelf, but that faith was the gift of God, and the work of the ſpirit, from theſe premiſes it was plain to us that, on this ſcheme, God was partial in his regards to his creatures, and thoſe only, on whom he beſtowed true and living faith, were choſen to life, while the reſt were left to periſh in their depravity and their ſins.

We were aware ſome would here urge that man is a free agent, and as life and death are ſet before him with a will free to chooſe, or to refuſe, if he do not chooſe life the fault muſt be entirely his own; arguments which, in a great meaſure, muſt be true, ſo long as man is conſidered as a reſponſible being. But while the total depravity of human nature is believed, ſo that man naturally cannot have any the leaſt inclination after that which is good without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, all ſuch reaſoning, in our humble opinion, will be

found lighter than the duſt in the balance. As well might we talk of a blind man painting a portrait, or any other impoſſibility.

But to return. Theſe, and other arguments that we had heard and read, led us to attend to thoſe ſcriptures that are ſuppoſed to ſpeak plainly upon the ſubject, which, after much converſation and uneaſineſs, we had received as ſo doing, not having been able otherwiſe to explain them; and though on embracing the ſcheme of Calviniſm as truth, we felt ſeveral objections not leſs hard to be removed conſiſtently with reaſon and the acknowledged goodneſs of God, yet we relieved our minds, like others before us, by reſolving all into his ſovereignty.

As there were a number of us who were friends intimately acquainted with each other, and principally on the ſcore of religion, we often met together, and often talked with each other about our religious experience, by means of which we gained an underſtanding of each other's ſituation relative to theſe things; and although we did not all alike readily come into theſe views, yet moſt of us acted together in them afterwards; and here we muſt take this credit to ourſelves, that whether we acted right or wrong, we always acted from principle, which led us, as we had made up our minds, to declare ourſelves Calviniſts, and to conſider what ſteps would be moſt proper to proſper the ſame.

After much conſultation, (as there were no Diſſenters of this ſort in this City at that time) we agreed to form ourſelves, in an orderly way, into a Connection upon Calviniſtic principles, and ſent

for a Miniſter from *London*, who accordingly came, and thus we endeavoured to ſpread, by every means in our power, what we thought was the truth.

Being thus ſettled in our new ſyſtem, we now made uſe of all likely means to acquaint ourſelves more thoroughly with the nature and extent of our principles, by peruſing the works of different Authors, eminent for their abilities, ſome of whom contended that the elect were choſen before all worlds, out of the pure maſs; while others contended they were choſen after the fall, out of the impure maſs; things, perhaps, indifferent in themſelves; for, upon the whole, it is of little conſequence when they were choſen, if they were choſen at all. Some contended that here the elect have poſitive evidence and aſſurance of their election; others, that here they have no poſitive certainty of this, but only the hope of it.

Theſe, and a number of ſuch doctrines, as electing love, effectual calling, eternal decrees, &c. were attended to, that by proper information we might be able to defend our ſcheme. In the mean-time our public preaching was well attended, and our ſociety increaſed; a circumſtance which to us was extremely agreeable. But now it ſo happened that ſome private affairs of our Miniſter made it neceſſary for him to leave us, and we were once more without a Leader; during which period we had occaſional lectures from different Miniſters, but no one upon whom we could regularly depend. This ſuggeſted the idea of applying to *Lady Huntington* for a regular ſupply, which ſhe readily granted. This continued for a conſiderable

time, during which we felt the weight of ſupporting our Miniſter, and other expences, to be very heavy, and ſometimes more than we well could bear; yet ſuch was our zeal for the cauſe that we made other conſiderations give way to this. All this time our experience was of a very fluctuating kind, and very often not of that ſort which we liked beſt.

At ſeaſons, indeed, we felt tranſported with joy at the proſpects of the elect, and our hearts bounded with gratitude to God, from the conſideration of our being the objects of his eternal love; but, for a large portion of our time, our experience did not at all anſwer theſe views, by reaſon of which our minds were often a prey to gloom and heavineſs, and we were often led to queſtion ourſelves whether we really were of the elect.

As we were not mentioned by name in the ſcriptures, we had, of courſe, like others, to depend upon our evidences, our marks, and our frames. When theſe were favourable, or when our paſſions were warmed and affected by hearing ſermons, or by other means, our hearts were filled with joy; but when we were dull and languid, they were oppreſſed with ſorrow; and as clouds and darkneſs often ſurrounded us, we were often ſubject to the moſt alarming doubts and fears. Theſe circumſtances increaſed our diligence and our inquiries, and, among other ſubjects, led to the conſideration of Baptiſm, which ended in our obedience to that ordinance by immerſion. This laſt ſtep compelled us unavoidably to break with *Lady Huntington*'s Connection, an event which did not give us much concern, not only as we felt ourſelves

juſtified in attending to what we thought right; but, independent of this, as we had a ſucceſſion of Miniſters, we were ſometimes ſupplied with young men more diſtinguiſhed for their miniſterial conſequence than for their humility and prudence. This ſtep not only made conſiderable noiſe without doors, but alſo occaſioned ſome confuſion among ourſelves; for all did not ſee alike the propriety of the meaſure, and beſides our being left again without a Miniſter greatly deranged our proceedings.

We had been baptized by a Calviniſt Miniſter in the Weſt Country, near *Leeds*; to him we had recourſe, and he frequently came and preached for us, but it was attended with a very conſiderable expence, that greatly affected our finances; what was ſtill worſe, we were greatly haraſſed in our minds in thoſe ſolemn moments of reflection, when we looked at the awful majeſty, wrath, and unappeaſed juſtice of God, and again at the dreadful condition of the reprobate, inevitably doomed to endleſs torments for the crime of another. The bare poſſibility of our being of that unhappy number filled us with little leſs than horror and deſpair.

In theſe ſeaſons of apprehenſion and perplexity we relieved our minds by the various maxims which are applied in theſe caſes, namely, That the Lord trieth his people; that afflictions await the righteous; that we muſt go to the kingdom through much tribulation, and that whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth; that though the enemy of ſouls, and of the ſaints in particular, may take every means to haraſs our minds, and

ſuggeſt evil things, yet greater is He that is for us than he that is againſt us, and that in the end none ſhould be able to lay any thing to the charge of God's elect, &c. &c.

Though theſe things aſſiſted us, yet ſo greatly did our fears preponderate that we tried every means to gain light upon the ſubject, inſomuch that wherever any man was particularly talked of as a fine man, an enlightened man, &c. we were ſure to hear him, if poſſible. Upon theſe occaſions we not unfrequently went ten, fifteen, twenty, and thirty miles to hear a ſermon, and to talk with the Miniſter; and it ſometimes happened that when we arrived at the place there was no preaching, which to men in our ſituation was no little diſappointment.

We now by ſome means became acquainted with the works of a *Mr. Johnſton*, of *Liverpool*, one main end of whoſe writings (at leaſt of thoſe that firſt fell into our hands) was to prove that both the Calviniſts and Methodiſts were eſſentially wrong, that their ſchemes were full of darkneſs, confuſion, and hypocriſy. Such aſſertions, ſupported as they ſeemed to be, excited in our uneaſy minds the moſt painful alarms, and ſtirred within us every ſource of anxiety. In the moſt earneſt manner we examined into the difference between his views and their's. In doing this, we found that *Mr. Johnſton* inſiſted there was no ſuch thing in exiſtence as a doubting believer, and for a man to be ſuppoſed to doubt and to believe in any thing at the ſame time was a groſs inſult upon common ſenſe. This increaſed, if poſſible, our perplexity, for it directly ſtruck at the root of every religious prin-

ciple we had hitherto imbibed. Here all our experience was loſt; for if what he aſſerted with ſuch confidence and plauſibility was right, all our ideas were wrong. In our confuſion of mind what was to be done? We referred to the works of thoſe we eſteemed excellent men, who had written on the different ſyſtems. We revolved in our reflections the different workings of their minds, and the fluctuating ſtate of their experience; and although theſe conſultations gave us ſome eaſe, yet they could not ſhelter us from the effects produced by *Mr. Johnſton*'s reaſoning, for in purſuing his arguments we found he rejected all theſe authorities, and appealed only to the ſcriptures, in numerous quotations from which he deeply intrenched himſelf.

In following him to theſe cited paſſages, we found they always ſpake with the greateſt confidence; that the firſt Chriſtians did not run at uncertainties, did not ſtumble about in the dark, that they were not in doubts whether they were in a ſafe ſituation, or whether they had received ſaving faith, or had an intereſt in the love of God, &c. &c. but that they knew their calling, and were filled with confidence and the moſt pleaſing expectation, and could rejoice in hope of the glory of God without fear.

As theſe conſiderations did not at all agree with our feelings, as we often had diſtreſſing doubts, we were led to conclude that we had not real Chriſtian experience, that we had been led by miſtaken notions, and that all was a deluſion, ſo that we were intirely ſtripped naked, as it were, of all our religion, that had coſt us ſo much trouble, and which we had

been years in acquiring. We were now brought into as ſingular circumſtances as perhaps ever people were, for we met together confeſſedly as a ſet of unbelievers, not that we denied or diſputed the truth of revelation, but as being ignorant of the faith of the goſpel. However, as we were determined to be right, we with all poſſible attention ſearched *Mr. Johnſton*'s writings for that purpoſe.

But here we fell into a great error, for we followed him inſtead of the ſcriptures, never ſuſpecting that he who had expoſed to our view ſuch darkneſs could fail of leading us into the light. This was a great weakneſs after all we had ſuffered, for by this meaſure we only left one ſet of men to follow another. As ſaving faith was the great object of our concern, we ſtrictly attended to it; and though he ſeverely reprobated the common notions about it, yet he made it, if poſſible, more myſterious, calling it a divine communication from God, that gave men ſuch poſitive aſſurances as to preclude all doubts; and to prove this, he almoſt filled half a volume with texts of ſcripture, which to us afforded the moſt ample ſatisfaction. Another of his leading ideas was, that, after receiving this juſtifying faith, we were conſtantly to wait and expect the ſame effuſions of the ſpirit that the firſt Chriſtians enjoyed; and he aſſerts, that ſince the Baptiſm of the Spirit was firſt given, there never was a real Miniſter of the goſpel who had it not in the ſame manner. All this, and much more, we received, for we attended to his writings as though they had been oracles

of infallible truth, never diſputing; for we did not examine them to ſee whether they were truth, but in order to underſtand their ſenſe, purſuing every good they held out, and that for a conſiderable time, though we never were ſo fortunate as to attain it.

It is not our intention to trouble you with an account of all this Gentleman's ſentiments, or to make obſervations on his ideas of the Fall, the nature of the puniſhment conſequent thereupon, on Redemption, the Soul of Man, and the Godhead, &c. &c. which would greatly exceed our intended limits. By the remarks that have been already made it will be ſeen how powerfully his reaſoning operated upon us, and how far it removed us from the common ſyſtems. We ſhall now by a remark or two ſhew how we left *Mr. Johnſton*'s principles.

It happened one day that one of our leading friends was reading one of his works, in which he was attempting to prove that the ſpirit was prayed to in the ſcripture. After referring to ſeveral paſſages, he ſeemed to lay conſiderable ſtreſs upon the Apoſtles concluding their epiſtles with a benediction for the churches. Although our friend at that time believed the thing true for which he was contending, yet his arguments from the above ſeemed ſo forced and weak, that from that time his confidence was ſhaken, and he rather ſuſpected a like fallacy in other inſtances. This led to a more ſtrict examination of his ſentiments, and the authorities upon which he grounded them; the reſult of which was, that his arguments appeared on other ſubjects often forced and irrational, and

that he ſeemed as often to miſapply the ſenſe of the ſcriptures as thoſe he condemned. Thus, by reading his works with other eyes than we had been accuſtomed to do for ſome time paſt, we loſt all confidence; and as he drew us off from others by expoſing their errors and inconſiſtencies, ſo by the ſame diſcoveries we alſo rejected him.

We had now raiſed in ourſelves a real ſpirit of examination, and in all our inquiries we ſought after, and aimed at, conſiſtency. We concluded that truth muſt be conſiſtent, and that where conſiſtency is wanting there muſt be error and darkneſs. As we had long ſought for this in vain in the writings of men, as we had oft with a heavy heart and faultering ſtep travelled through volumes of doctrines of experience and controverſy, without meeting with conſiſtency and reſt, we now grew weary of the purſuit, and came to a determination entirely to lay aſide all men and their books, of whatever ſort they might be, and to ſtudy and follow the ſcriptures only, which determination we put into immediate execution. We ſoon experienced the happy effects of a practical adherence to this reſolution, for by reflection and attentive reading of the ſcriptures we diſcovered that faith is not the gift of God, or the immediate work of the ſpirit, as commonly believed, but that it comes by hearing, and is the reſult or effect of evidence alone. Here light began firſt to dawn upon our minds, and to ſhed its genial influence over our longing ſouls. With joy unſpeakable we rejoiced in the freedom of the goſpel. We now ſaw with pleaſure that the ſalvation of God was not involved in myſteries, or ſurrounded with difficulties; that

in order to attain to the enjoyment of it, it was not neceſſary that we ſhould experience ſome impulſive workings on the mind, or ſome unaccountable frames, evidences, or applications wrought in us by the agency of the ſpirit. We came ſimply to this point: Do the ſcriptures contain the mind of God, and does he ſpeak the truth? May he be confided in, or credited? If ſo, then whatever good they contain is inſured to the man who believes and obeys them with uprightneſs. By this diſcovery we ſaw that moſt of our former religious proceedings were labour in vain, being made uſe of as means to attain an end to which they were never appointed, but by the wiſdom of men, which, without the guidance of ſcripture, is ſeldom uſeful in matters of religion. In ſhort, we ſaw into the nature of many religious ſubjects, and diſcovered them to be very different from what they had appeared before, and we now enjoyed ſuch compoſure and tranquillity of mind as till that time we were utter ſtrangers to. While by the operation of rational truth upon our minds our knowledge increaſed, our powers expanded ſo as more fully to comprehend the deſigns and purpoſes of God, and we were delivered from error and darkneſs juſt ſo far as we received light and truth from the ſcriptures themſelves; thus we became rational creatures.

The meaſure of leaving all men and their books, and betaking ourſelves ſolely to the reading of the ſcriptures as our only rule and guide in matters of religion, is to us one of the moſt memorable events of our lives; an event which, even at this diſtance of time, we contemplate with the warmeſt gra-

titude, and on which we never think but with renewed ſatisfaction. To the rational, reflecting mind it may, in ſome ſort, ſhew the powers of the human intellect of unaſſiſted reaſon, even in the loweſt ſituations, where there is previouſly a genuine ſpirit of inquiry, and an ardent deſire after truth, even to the overcoming the force of prejudice, and every other difficulty that may ſtand in the way.

Our minds being thus ſatisfied, and now at reſt reſpecting faith and doctrine, we ſet about forming ourſelves into a body upon theſe principles, for every honeſt mind in all its reſearches will ever be careful to combine principle with practice, in order that the good, the ſubſtance of all may be enjoyed. Order and diſcipline are eſſential to the exiſtence, peace, and well being of every community; accordingly we laid aſide all the articles, creeds, and orders of men, and reſolved, in matters of church government and diſcipline, ſtrictly to adhere to the primitive practice of the Apoſtles, ſo far as the difference of circumſtances would admit. No perſon, therefore, amongſt us is bound by any law whatever, or called upon to ſubmit to any rule but what is evidently contained in the New Teſtament; he may follow any direction contained there, without making a ſchiſm in the body.

Following then this rule, we found there, and ſtill find, that the very firſt ſtep any perſon was called to take after his believing Jeſus to be the Meſſiah, was openly to confeſs him as ſuch, by being baptized in his name. By this he became a diſciple of Chriſt, and was initiated a member of the Church; and as infant ſprinkling is ſolely a tradition of men, the ſcriptures never once no-

ticing it, we copied after the example of the firſt Chriſtians; and though we know the practice to be now unfaſhionable, and of courſe conſidered as ridiculous and unacceptable to the generality of profeſſing Chriſtians, yet we feel perfectly juſtified in acting from the ſuperior motive of duty, rather than that of pleaſing men, for if we acted to pleaſe men, we ſhould not be the ſervants of God. But our beſt apology for being Baptiſts is, that we find none but Baptiſts in the New Teſtament. Our Lord was a Baptiſt; he commiſſioned his Apoſtles to preach it; they were Baptiſt Miniſters, and all that gladly received their word were baptized. But we are wandering too far; we mean not to argue the matter here, but merely to deſcribe our own proceedings. I am,

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR FRIEND,

IN the foregoing letter we have in part complied with your requeſt, by giving you a brief relation of our ideas and experience, and of the ſad ſtate of uncertainty we were in during our progreſs through the different ſyſtems we have mentioned. But that you may be the better able to judge of the propriety or impropriety of our conduct, we ſhall recapitulate the leading doctrines we had before embraced, and give ſome of the principal reaſons that have induced us to leave them; and though we did not relinquiſh our former opinions, nor acquire new ones in any orderly way, but, as we have already obſerved, firſt got ſome light by the conſideration of faith coming by hearing and depending upon evidence, yet it appears to us moſt proper to proceed with our remarks in the following order, for the ſake of perſpicuity:

1ſt. Original ſin, and the inability of man to do the will of God.

2dly. The work of the Spirit.

3dly. Faith, as the gift of God.

4thly. Election and Reprobation.
5thly. Satisfaction of Chriſt.
6thly. The Trinity. And
Laſtly, A brief view of our preſent ſentiments.

Firſt, With reſpect to the tranſgreſſion of Adam. Various texts of ſcripture are quoted to prove that its effects upon his offspring are of the moſt dreadful nature, no leſs than a total depravity of mind, and a ſpiritual and eternal death; or, in other words, that they were made liable to ſuffer eternal torments. No notion can be more unreaſonable and unſcriptural than this. The ſentence paſſed upon Adam was, "The day thou eateſt thereof thou ſhalt ſurely die[a]." Now though Adam ſinned and incurred this penalty of death, and "that by his offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation, and ſo death reigned over all men[b]," yet this ſuffering by the fall is chiefly of a corporeal and temporal nature; and though by ſorrow and pain, and the force of bad example, &c. the mind of man may be greatly affected, and he, by his diſordered paſſions and propenſities, may be hurried into great exceſſes, yet here is certainly nothing that can imply ſuch a total depravity of ſoul as that man cannot think a good thought, or work a good work, as is generally aſſerted to be the natural effect of Adam's fall.

Another paſſage brought to this end is from Geneſis[c]. "And God ſaw that the wickedneſs of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. God looked upon the earth, and be-

[a] Geneſis, ii. 17.—[b] Romans v.—[c] Gen. vi. 6, 12

hold it was corrupt, for all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth." From theſe, and ſimilar paſſages, we were fully ſatisfied of the depravity of the world, not only of the period of which we are now ſpeaking, but of every period ſince that time. This is never diſputed by any one; but our inquiry is, Whether it was, or is, of real neceſſity the inevitable effect of original depravity, or voluntary? If of inevitable original depravity, then it muſt have been univerſal; but there are ſeveral ſtrong exceptions to ſuch a concluſion. That it was not univerſal, is plain; for in the ſame chapter, verſe 9th, it is ſaid, "Noah was a juſt man, and perfect in his generation, and that he walked with God." And again, becauſe God ſaw him righteous, he ſaved him in the ark. But if all fleſh had corrupted his way ſo as to *merit* deſtruction, this implies choice and action, therefore a gradual or voluntary corruption; for God juſtifies his conduct in deſtroying them, becauſe of their wickedneſs: but if it was an unavoidable, natural corruption, they could not help it; and for Infinite Goodneſs to deſtroy his creatures for what they could not help, is as contrary to our reaſon as it is to the declaration of ſcripture. We there learn that "his goodneſs and mercy are over all his works [a];" that "he doth not willingly afflict the children of men [b]," but "compaſſionately conſiders the feebleneſs of their frame [c]." Theſe remarks do not refer to men being brought into a ſtate of death by natural conſequence, but to the

[a] Pſalm cxlv. 9.—[b] Lamentations iii. 33.—[c] Pſalm ciii. 14.

idea of God inflicting poſitive puniſhments, as in the caſe of the flood, &c. &c.

From this early period of the world till the time of David, a period of eight or nine hundred years, there is little or nothing urged in behalf of the total depravity of man, even by the friends of the doctrine. In this long period Abraham is called; God bleſſes him with great promiſes, and makes of him a great nation; they go into Egypt, and are there brought into bondage. After a long captivity, they are delivered by the greateſt diſplays of Almighty power. In their journey through the wilderneſs they are preſerved and ſupplied by the extraordinary interpoſition of the Divine Being: they prove ungrateful, and diſobey; and though they have the ſtrongeſt evidences of God being their deliverer and guide, yet have not confidence and unſhaken faith in him. God reproaches them with their ingratitude and unbelief, and deſtroys them for it before they enter the Promiſed Land.

In all this there is not one word of the complete depravity of their nature; they are avowedly deſtroyed for their diſobedience and unbelief: but if they could not believe nor obey, that would have been a plea ſufficient in their favour with a merciful and compaſſionate God; if not, then their deſtruction juſtly lies upon God for withholding faith, for not changing their hearts, as they could not do it of themſelves; a thought moſt injurious to the character of a juſt and good God.

Farther: Their deſcendants who entered the Promiſed Land had given for their obſervance a law, holy, juſt, and good, the obedience or diſobedience to which it was declared ſhould be at-

tended by great temporal rewards or puniſhments. Moſes, their law-giver, ſuppoſes them capable of obſerving it, by his earneſt and pathetic exhortations in which he preſſes them "to obey God, to keep the law, and to perform all that he had commanded them[a]," but ſays not a word of the total depravity of their nature, or of their inability to do the will of God, but on the contrary tells them, that if they did well it ſhould go well with them, and if they did evil it ſhould go ill with them: he called heaven and earth to witneſs that he had ſet life and death before them, and left them to chooſe whether they would ſerve the Lord or not; but if they were incapable of inclining after that which is good, they could not chooſe the ſervice of the Lord, much leſs could they ſerve him.

Again: We are told that "Iſrael ſerved the Lord all the days of Joſhua, and all the days of the Elders who lived after Joſhua, and who had known all the works of the Lord that he had done for Iſrael[b]." Thus, in purſuing the hiſtory of this people till the goſpel, we find an account of a great many good men, of their great zeal in the ſervice of God, and their great advances in piety and holineſs; alſo of many bad men, their vice and wickedneſs, and of the corrupt ſtate of the people as a nation; but theſe vices are never referred by the ſcripture to the total depravity of their nature by the ſin of Adam. The reaſons aſſigned for it in the ſcripture are "the forſaking the law of their youth," "going a-whoring after the ſtrange gods of the Heathen," and neglecting

a See the obſervations fully confirmed in Deuteronomy.

b Joſhua xxiv. 31.

the worſhip of the Lord God of Iſrael, " defiling themſelves with all uncleanneſs, and forgetting to do judgement, righteouſneſs, and truth," &c &c. Theſe are all voluntary acts of diſobedience, and upon this very principle are all the admonitions, threatnings, and exhortations applied. It is true there are ſome ſingle texts in the Pſalms and the Prophets, which are ſuppoſed to ſpeak another language, as when David ſays " he was ſhapen in iniquity, and in ſin did his mother conceive him.[a]" Again: " The wicked are eſtranged from the womb, they go aſtray as ſoon as they are born, ſpeaking lies[b]." Surely ſuch language as this will not bear to be underſtood literally, for when a child is born it cannot ſpeak at all, much leſs ſpeak lies. If they will bear another meaning, it is neither ſafe nor wiſe to oppoſe ſingle figurative texts to the general ſcope of ſcripture, which, in ſuch caſes, ought always to preponderate. That theſe texts cannot eſtabliſh the notion of a total depravity of intellect, we think muſt be evident to every attentive mind; for all the pleadings of David for himſelf and the righteous, as well as the wicked, proceed quite upon other principles, namely, thoſe of choice and reſponſibility. They may, indeed, prove the prevalence and extreme danger of early habits of vice, and of great corruptneſs of principle, or the weakneſs and ſinfulneſs of the age in which he lived, but ſurely they will not prove a natural neceſſity of ſinning againſt God from the womb, ſo as to be incapable of attending to any thing that is good.

[a] Pſalm li. 5.—[b] Pſalm lviii. 3

It is contrary to all our ideas of the perfection of God to ſuppoſe that he would place or ſuffer his creatures, by any means, to be brought into ſuch a ſtate as to be under an abſolute neceſſity of conſtantly offending againſt him, ſo that their very beſt works ſhould only be ſplendid ſins, and then puniſh them everlaſtingly for it: this is an idea of our merciful Creator ſo revolting to the thinking mind as to require the plaineſt and ſtrongeſt evidence to ſupport it.

Without ſtopping to make more obſervations on the Old Teſtament, we ſhall now proceed in our remarks to the New Teſtament, relative to the ſame ſubject. There we find that our Lord conſidered the Jews as being capable of acting right, and being juſtly reſponſible for not doing ſo. He aſks them, "Yea, and why even of yourſelves cannot ye judge what is right[a]?" In all his miniſtry he never inculcates any ſuch notion in plain terms, never acquaints them with the radical corruption of their nature by the ſin of Adam. Indeed it is hard to ſuppoſe that he who was ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed for his goodneſs, tenderneſs, and moderation, ſhould ſo ſeverely rebuke the Jews for their blindneſs, hypocriſy, and diſobedience, if he knew that they were under an invincible neceſſity of being ſo, through the depravity of their nature. It rather appears that if he reproached them, it was for the perverſion of their diſpenſation, their miſconduct, their inſenſibility, and wickedneſs, by making the ſcriptures of no effect by their traditions; for their carnal attendance upon the pure worſhip of God, and thereby unfitting themſelves for receiving him (the Meſſiah) the end and ſubſtance of

[a] Luke xii 57.

theſe ſcriptures, but he did not reproach them all; of *ſome* he ſpoke highly. Whence then came this difference? Did their merit conſiſt in their virtuous adherence to the ſervice of God voluntarily, from choice, or was it the diſcriminating influence of the ſpirit on their minds? If the latter, they had no more merit, and were no more the ſubjects of praiſe than thoſe he condemned, ſince that ſame ſuper-natural influence, which made ſome good, could equally have made all ſo, for the difference in that caſe lay not in them, but in the work of the ſpirit; ideas quite foreign to every thing that is recorded concerning them.

In like manner, the Apoſtles in all their preaching never tell the people they were ſo corrupt by nature that they had no power to do the will of God, nor do they ever reflect on them, or upbraid them for their natural depravity; but, on the contrary, they uniformly addreſſed them as being capable of hearing and obeying; and when they reject the Apoſtles and their words, they condemn them for it, as being capable of doing better. There are other texts that might be noticed here, but theſe will fall better under our conſideration in the next ſubject.

Thus it was from a ſurvey of the ſcope of the ſcriptures, which is allowed on all hands to be the only true way of coming at their ſenſe, we perceived that neither Moſes nor the Prophets, Chriſt nor his Apoſtles, ever taught the world that mankind are ſo depraved and corrupted by reaſon of original ſin, that they cannot hear, believe, and obey God. When men attempt to deduce this doctrine from ſingle expreſſions, and appeal to

the bad conduct of men as a proof of the total pollution of their nature, they act a violent and unwarrantable part, which cannot be juſtified by any fair mode of interpretation. With equal juſtice might we argue the good ſide, and conclude, from the good conduct of ſome, the univerſal purity of all. All men have their infirmities and weakneſſes, but certainly not to this amount [a].

To conſider the ſubject philoſophically, or according to the actual ſtate of things. It evidently appears that men, without revelation, in numberleſs inſtances have maintained a worthy and highly generous conduct, and by the proper exerciſe of their reaſonable faculties in ſtudying the works of the univerſe, the nature of moral principles, and the powers of the human mind, have been capable of attaining to an high degree of cultivation and virtue; and moreover, that if men could make diſcoveries in abſtruſe ſciences, and explain other great difficulties in nature, they ſurely were not under ſuch a natural debility as not to be able to underſtand and believe a plain, ſimple, well-atteſted fact, revealed from heaven. If men are affected by communications from men, according to their nature, why may they not be affected by communications from heaven, ſuitable to their nature?

a It is generally conſidered as a concluſive argument, that becauſe all have ſinned, all of courſe are depraved. Suppoſe this ſhould be admitted, does this prove any more than that all mankind ſtand in need of mercy? As the Apoſtle reaſons, "God hath concluded all under ſin, that he might have mercy upon all." But is there the moſt diſtant hint given in the New Teſtament that man, imperfect as he is, cannot receive the mercy that God has graciouſly and freely proclaimed for him? Surely not.

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Farther: Human nature, even in its worſt eſtate, has ſomething in it that approves of virtue, juſtice, and mercy; and that there is ſomething in the breaſt of the moſt profligate that feels indignation when innocence and virtue ſuffer unjuſtly, or are treated with cruelty; that the moſt vicious and abandoned of men, in their moments of reflection, give the preference to purity and goodneſs, and moſt ardently wiſh they had been ſuch, rather than what they are, cannot be controverted. But if man were unable to incline after that which is good, theſe things could not be; however, as they are true in fact, and true in nature, they cannot be falſe in religion. There is not a profligate or libertine to be found, but that if he had an aged parent, or helpleſs infant, whom he tenderly loved, to ſettle in ſome family, he would place them in a virtuous one, and not in a brothel, though the latter he loved beſt for himſelf. In ſupport of this principle we could produce a number of illuſtrations, but we think more would be unneceſſary.

Fromtheſe, and ſimilar conſiderations, it appeared to us that the depravity of the human mind, by original ſin, is unſupported either by ſcripture or reaſon. This doctrine, however, is the ground-work of many popular doctrines in the orthodox ſyſtems of religion.

From this is inferred, that man has no power to do the will of God; hence ariſes the ſuppoſed neceſſity of the work of the ſpirit, that faith is the gift of God, &c. &c. but as the doctrine itſelf is not founded in truth, all that is built upon it is of the ſame nature; for if the premiſes arefalſe,

ſo are the concluſions [a], as we ſhall attempt to ſhew more at large in another letter.

Your's, &c. &c.

a As the New Teſtament Preachers never, in plain terms, aſſert the radical corruption of man, by Adam's ſin, ſo that he cannot be influenced by motives to do any thing good, any more than a dead man can riſe and walk, this doctrine is ſupported only by inferences and reaſoning; and as it is a groſs reflection upon the Deity, as well as a libel upon human nature, there is the beſt ground to ſuſpect that the arguments are fallacious which are adduced in its ſupport; for what is it but an attempt to prove by reaſon, that reaſon itſelf is corrupt, and thus to invalidate their own argument.

LETTER III.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE doctrine of the Spirit next claims our attention; a doctrine ſo intimately connected with the ſubject conſidered in the foregoing letter, that however they may be diſtinguiſhed, they are not to be ſeparated. The work of the ſpirit upon the mind, in the view of religious people of this perſuaſion, is ſo plainly and clearly revealed in ſcripture as to be the life and ſpring of the whole; and hence they infer the total depravity of human nature that thus made it neceſſary. Thus they firſt labour to prove the radical corruption of man by nature, to ſupport their notion of the prior work of the ſpirit upon the heart; and, on the other ſide, taking it for granted that the work of the ſpirit, in their ſenſe, is ſcriptural, conclude that man muſt be very corrupt indeed to make ſuch a work upon the heart neceſſary. By this notion of the ſpirit influencing and pervading the whole religious œconomy of the world, man is reduced, notwithſtanding his boaſted powers of reaſon, to a mere cypher, a paſſive inſtrument, fought for, and alternately poſſeſſed and uſed by God and the Devil; and as the one is weakened, the other

prevails. Beſides the abſurdity of making the Devil nearly equal with God in the conteſt, and thereby expoſing revelation itſelf to the unjuſt aſſertions of the gain-ſayer, the reaſonable powers of man are loſt ſight of, and the ſcripture doctrine of man's reſponſibility, appears with the moſt harſh and unjuſtifiable aſpect.

However, we ſhall proceed to review the ſubject, and give our reaſons for what we ſay; but it will perhaps be hard for you, or any perſon, not under the ſame previous influences, to conceive what difficulties attended this part of our progreſs. Our minds were ſo immerſed in the commonly received notions, that long after we ſaw into their fallacy we were frequently taken by ſurprize with a number of texts, as we ſuppoſed them to be, becauſe commonly quoted as ſuch, that bound our minds, and cramped our reflections; which, however, upon cloſe examination were found to have no exiſtence in ſcripture, but to owe their being to Catechiſms, Common Prayer-Book, and other works of men; expreſſions that are not ſuſpected, becauſe commonly uſed.

But we with to obſerve, leſt we be miſunderſtood, that we do not intend to deny that God can aſſiſt his people, or to diſpute the propriety of his people praying for, and expecting ſuch aſſiſtance, by no means, for this the ſcriptures teach us to look for, and repreſent it as our duty, as well as our privilege, to make uſe of every means that the Father of Mercies has afforded us. The ſpirits of all men are in his hands; in him we live, and move, and have our being; he can change, impreſs, and affect them according to his good pleaſure; he can work

by means unſeen by us; he is the Governor of the World; natural or providential circumſtances, and the relative conditions of human life, are the inſtruments of his power, as well as the miniſtry of the word, and the energy of his ſpirit. In ſhort, the Chriſtian is encouraged to pray, and to pray in faith, for the "eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers." The drift of our reaſoning is directed againſt the common belief, that men are ſo depraved, that they can neither deſire nor believe the goſpel, without the prior work of the ſpirit upon the heart. On this we have carefully ſearched the ſcriptures, and do moſt poſitively aſſert that they contain no ſuch doctrine; and we farther aſſert, that no man can read the New Teſtament with the leaſt attention, and maintain or give one example from thence of our Lord ever, on any occaſion, inſtructing unbelievers to pray for faith, or for the internal evidence and operation of his ſpirit, to enable them to believe, but that he uniformly calls unbelievers to believe on him whom the Father hath ſanctified and ſent into the world. All the works that he did were for this end, to eſtabliſh his character as the Meſſiah, not that men might pray and wreſtle for the inward evidence of the ſpirit, but that men might believe that he was the Chriſt, and, by believing, have life through his name.

Speaking to the Jews, he ſays, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye ſhall die in your ſins, and where I am, there ye cannot come." What language is this for the mild and compaſſionate Jeſus to make uſe of? that if the Jews did not believe, they ſhould die in their ſins, and loſe happineſs,

if at the ſame time they had no power to believe without the prior work of the ſpirit? And how could they ſeek for it when they were never told ſo to do? or how could he command them to pray to God that he would give them to know their intereſt in Chriſt, when they did not believe in Chriſt, and more eſpecially when he knew their hearts were ſo corrupt that God could not hear them? When the Jews, through blind prejudice, did not believe on him through his word, nor yet through the works that he wrought, they were conſidered as diſobedient, ſtiff-necked ſinners, and threatened with an excluſion from happineſs. But ſurely this evidently ſuppoſes that they could believe and attend to his words, or where would be the juſtneſs of the threatning? Our Lord uſes ſuch expreſſions as theſe: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and ye ſhall find reſt to your ſouls." "He that cometh unto me, I will in no wiſe caſt out." "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life," &c. We could not ſee the propriety of this manner of ſpeaking, without ſuppoſing that men could come unto him, and could believe on him. The language and ſpirit of his preaching is not, that ye muſt pray for the work of the ſpirit, that ye *cannot believe*, or that ye cannot come unto me, but that ye *will not* believe, that ye will not come unto me.

We could not think that the ſacred writers would ſay, "He that believeth not ſhall not ſee life, but the wrath of God abideth on him;" "he that believeth not is condemned already;" "he that believeth not maketh God a liar, becauſe he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son," &c. &c.

if men were not able to believe. This would be condemning men for not doing what was not in their power to do. With theſe views we could not conſider God either good or juſt.

It is exactly the ſame on the other ſide of the queſtion: "Believe on the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved;" "he that believeth ſhall be ſaved," "hath eternal life," "is born again," "is a ſon of God," "ſhall inherit the kingdom," &c. &c. We could not, nor can we now, ſee the propriety of exhorting men to believe, and telling them they ſhall be ſaved by it, if to believe was not in their power, but the gift of the ſpirit, and depending upon another, not on themſelves; and we have already ſaid they were never taught to ſeek it by prayer, &c.

Farther: In examining the miniſtry of the Apoſtles, we never found them inſtructing the people that faith is a gift, that they muſt pray for it, or that they muſt have the influence of the ſpirit to enable them to believe, to reveal Chriſt in their hearts, or to apply his atoning blood to their ſinful conſcience, according to the language commonly uſed by modern Preachers.

From time to time we have had much converſation with religious people, and with Miniſters not a few. During theſe converſations, we conſtantly urged, that as they would not, as honeſt men, recommend any thing in matters of ſalvation, without having good ſcriptural authority for it, we hoped they would give us their authority for their uſing ſuch expreſſions as we have juſt mentioned, namely, *where* unbelievers are taught to pray for the influence of the ſpirit, or for the gift of faith, &c.

when, after an unpleaſant pauſe, they have anſwered, They thought there were plenty of ſuch texts, but that juſt then they could not recollect them. This was, and is, the common reply; and though we allow them ever ſo much time, ſtill their memory fails them; and no wonder, for that man muſt have a notable memory indeed that can furniſh him with paſſages where there are none! No; the Apoſtles always addreſſed men as rational creatures, capable of underſtanding, believing, and obeying what they preached. We confeſs that in following the Apoſtles through all their travels, looking carefully at what they preached to all ſorts of people wherever they came, we could not, nor can we find one inſtance of their ever telling their hearers to pray for the influence of the ſpirit, the gift of faith, &c. Alas! then, what numbers of ſermons have been, and are conſtantly preached, which anſwer no purpoſe but to delude and miſlead the hearers! This cannot be conſidered as a ſimple error, or a trifling difference of opinion; for hence ariſes that middle character of people, called *Seekers*, who are very numerous in ſome Connections. Theſe Seekers are a new character, and not to be found in the New Teſtament; there all are conſidered either as believers or unbelievers, ſaints or ſinners. In the New Teſtament there is no middle character, no medium. Theſe Seekers are a compound character, ſaid to partake of both, but are completely neither. This is a novel improvement on the Apoſtles' plan, the ill effects of which are, that on this principle thouſands of ignorant, though ſerious and well-diſpoſed people, are ſet to ſeek for

months and years, often with tears and a heavy heart, for the gift of faith, for the marks and manifeſtations of their intereſt in the love of God by the aſſurance of the ſpirit, conſiſting in ſome rapturous emotions, or energetic workings upon the mind, the great uncertainty of which, with the fluctuating ſtate of the experience and of the mind, makes this work of ſeeking to be attended with the moſt painful anxiety, ſo much ſo, that great numbers of ſerious people may date their ſorrows from the time they became religious, ſo tortured have they been between the contending paſſions of hope and fear, or of hope and deſpair; and perhaps the inſtances are not a few in which they have finally fallen into a total derangement of the underſtanding. However, to ſupport this ſtrange, unſcriptural doctrine, the Teachers of it miſapply a number of texts, though not intentionally, citing every paſſage that has the leaſt appearance of countenancing their views, without paying ſufficient attention to the natural meaning of ſuch paſſages, and they confound all the diſtinctions the inſpired writers have made, in this caſe, between the ſaints and the world, by indiſcriminately applying thoſe ſcriptures that are only addreſſed to the Churches, to either believers or unbelievers.

Now whatever is addreſſed to ſaints or believers, cannot ſurely be applied to, or belong to any other of oppoſite character; but when they are addreſſed to characters to which they do not in truth belong, then their meaning is proſtituted, and their deſign loſt. In theſe reſpects we found religious people greatly erred from not underſtanding, or not at-

tending to the particular character to whom theſe ſcriptures were addreſſed.

Believers, or diſciples, are encouraged to pray by every argument, or figure of ſpeech, and are as conſtantly enjoined to pray in faith, or they have no aſſurance of receiving what they aſk from God. Unbelievers are conſidered as "wicked men," thoſe that "make God a liar, becauſe they believe not the record that he gave of his Son." They are conſidered as "enemies to truth," to "be of the world," thoſe "that do not pleaſe God," &c. &c. of which number all are conſidered who pay no regard to religion, though they may have the name.

If "the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to God;" if "whatſoever is not of faith be ſin;" if "without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God;" then it is no wonder that unbelievers are never taught to pray by the Apoſtles, for "the Lord heareth not ſinners." Their conſtant theme was, "Believe on the Lord Jeſus, and thou ſhalt be ſaved;" but the advocates for unbelievers ſeeking the ſpirit and faith by prayer, bring a number of texts to prove their doctrine, which we ſhall now notice. The firſt and principal is from our Lord's ſermon on the Mount. "Aſk, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall opened unto you: for every one that ſeeketh, findeth; and he that aſketh, receiveth; and to him that knocketh, it ſhall be opened." Now the queſtion is, Who are here addreſſed? for whoever the perſons were to whom our Lord ſpeaks, theſe inſtructions belong to them, and to none elſe. The ſermon begins thus: "And ſeeing the multitude, he went up into a

mountain, and when he was ſat, his diſciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught THEM." For any perſon ſeriouſly to conſider the ſublime truths theſe chapters contain, and ſuppoſe them to have been ſpoken to the unbelieving multitude, who neither believed on him nor regarded his authority, is perfectly abſurd. However it is plainly expreſſed, that they are the diſciples who are here taught to pray, thoſe who believed on him, which is conſiſtent with the whole chain of ſcripture, and not unbelieving Seekers; therefore this proves nothing to their purpoſe. The parable of the unjuſt Judge and the importunate Widow, is much uſed to encourage the Seekers. But this, unfortunately for them, is as unfriendly as the former, for it is not ſpoken to unbelievers, but to the diſciples, for their ſupport, by ſhewing them that God will not be unmindful of his people. It concludes thus: "And ſhall not God avenge his own elect," his ſervants, and not unbelieving Seekers?

The following paſſages are ſuppoſed to be deciſive upon this matter: "No man cometh to me, except the Father which ſent me draw him[a]." Here, without taking the context into the account, it is inferred that no man can come to God, unleſs he be inwardly wrought upon by the ſpirit; a concluſion perfectly arbitrary, and which is not expreſſed. Our Lord goes on to obſerve, "It is written in the Prophets, and they ſhall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, (viz. by the teaching of the Prophets) cometh unto me." If the character and works of the promiſed Meſſiah had not been deſcribed by the Prophets, how could

[a] John vi. 44.

the Jews have known by their ſcriptures who he was? But as theſe characters and theſe works were deſcribed, all who loved and attended to the Prophets could know the Meſſiah when he made his appearance, by his character and works anſwering to the deſcription there given of them. By means of the prophecies, men could learn of the Father, and to them Chriſt refers his hearers. "Search the ſcriptures, for they are they that teſtify of me, or elſe believe on me for the very works ſake." If his miraculous works were not to prove him the Meſſiah, for what were they intended? or how can we prove him the Meſſenger of God but by thoſe means? All this amounts to no more than that men were drawn to Chriſt by the writings of the Prophets, which deſcribed his character and works, which proved him to be the Meſſiah, i. e. by the power of evidence, of motives, and of ordinary inſtruction; all which ſuppoſes that men have power to attend to them. "Without me, ye can do nothing[a]." This paſſage by modern Preachers is uſed to ſhew that man can do nothing profitable in religion without the inward aſſiſtance of the ſpirit. It is really aſtoniſhing how men can impoſe upon themſelves ſo, when, by a very little attention, they may ſee it means no ſuch thing.

In this paſſage our Lord in highly figurative language tells his friends, juſt before he leaves them, "that he is the true vine, and that they, as branches, cannot bear fruit, except they abide in the vine; for without him they can do nothing, or bear no fruit as Chriſtians." He could not mean that without the energy of the ſpirit they could not believe, for they were believers and Apoſtles already. Be-

[a] John xv. 5.

ſides, he is not ſpeaking of the natural powers of man, but of the holineſs of life and uſefulneſs of conduct that his goſpel would produce in them, if they did not abandon it, but abode in him. "To be carnally minded, is death; but to be ſpiritually minded, is life and peace. The carnal mind is enmity againſt God, for it is not ſubject to the law of God, neither indeed can be: ſo then they that are in the fleſh cannot pleaſe God[a]." It is a plain truth, that they who indulge in the luſts of the fleſh cannot pleaſe God, and that the carnal mind was, is, and always will be at war with the ſpirit of purity. All this is ſelf evident, but it is little to the purpoſe. It is not here ſaid that man is under a neceſſity of thus being carnally minded; or that if he is carnally minded, he cannot turn from his evil ways, and receive the mercy of God. The following paſſage is nearly ſimilar: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the ſpirit of God, for they are fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned[b]." True, while the natural or ſenſual man only ſeeks the indulgence of his ſenſual appetites, he ſeeth not, nor careth for the things of the ſpirit; they are fooliſhneſs unto him, or of no account. But here the queſtion returns again, Is he compelled to do the luſts of the fleſh? cannot he repent and become a good man? cannot he believe and obey the goſpel? or where is it recorded that man cannot repent, and believe, and obey God?

"For our goſpel came not unto you in word only, but alſo in power, and in the Holy Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your ſake[c]." The ſame Apoſtle has

[a] Romans viii. 7, 8.—[b] 1 Corinthians ij. 14.—[c] 1 Theſſalonians i. 5.

a ſimilar paſſage to the Corinthians: "And my ſpeech and my words were not with enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power, that your faith ſhould not ſtand in the wiſdom of man, but in the power of God[a]." It appears to us that theſe paſſages have no alluſion to an inward work of the ſpirit upon the mind, but to the entrance of the Apoſtle among thoſe people, when he firſt preached to them. He here calls their attention to the circumſtances in which he firſt made known the goſpel to them, that it was not in word only, but with the power of working miracles, which they ſaw, giving ſuch demonſtration of the ſpirit as gave them much aſſurance that he, the Apoſtle, was the true meſſenger of God; and thus their faith did not reſt on the wiſdom of man, nor on his words only, but in the manifeſted power of God.

As the end of miracles was to eſtabliſh the goſpel, it is obvious that this is his meaning, and it is altogether conformable to the reſt of the Apoſtles' preaching. Our Lord aſſures his diſciples, that if he goes away, "he will ſend them the Comforter, who, when he was come, ſhould reprove the world of ſin, of righteouſneſs, and of judgment." It is generally read, *convince* the world of ſin; and as all are not convinced of ſin, the Calviniſts conſider this paſſage as relating only to the elect world, and then they urge it as being deciſive, that the ſpirit is appointed to work in the minds of men conviction for ſin. But they ought to know, that by the law is the knowledge of ſin[b], and not by the work of the ſpirit. Surely there is a great deal of difference

[a] 1 Corinthians ii. 4, 5.—[b] Romans iii. 20.—vii. 7.

between reproving the world of ſin, and convincing it. We may reprove a perſon for ſinning, and not ſucceed in convincing him. But Chriſt went away, and the Comforter came; the Apoſtles received him on the day of Pentecoſt, and he by them reproved the world of ſin, in crucifying the Prince of Life, their promiſed Meſſiah, as an Impoſtor, by the outward evidence of miracles and tongues in his name, and not by any inward working in the Jews. Beſides, when our Lord made this promiſe to the diſciples, he tells them the world could not receive it. How can men reconcile their creed with this declaration? Unbelievers, in this, as well as in all other parts of ſcripture, are called the world; and yet it is ſtrangely contended, that unbelievers, in the firſt inſtance, muſt ſeek for the ſpirit, when our Lord aſſerts, as above, that the world cannot receive it. Now they muſt admit one of theſe two things: either that unbelievers are not the world, or of the world, unſcriptural as it is, or that their ſyſtems, in this reſpect, are in flat contradiction to our Lord's affirmation.

There is one paſſage more that we had nearly overlooked, upon which is laid the greateſt poſſible ſtreſs. It occurs in the converſation held between Nicodemus and our Lord: "The wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit." It muſt be allowed that there is ſome difficulty attending theſe words; the language is highly figurative, and not eaſy to be underſtood. While it is almoſt generally thought, and confidently affirmed to aſſert that man is changed, renewed, and

born again, by the inward operation of the ſpirit upon the ſoul, there are others who think that our Lord alluded merely to that extraordinary effuſion of the ſpirit, which the diſciples received at the day of Pentecoſt, whereby they fully opened and eſtabliſhed the goſpel or ſpiritual diſpenſation, into which the Jews were born, by their receiving him as the Meſſiah, and thus delivered from the law of commandments contained in ordinances, &c. &c. Be this as it may, no candid mind would wiſh to build any doctrine upon one dark paſſage, for this text has not a parallel in all the New Teſtament. We think it much the fairer way, when a dark paſſage occurs, to explain it according to the obvious ſenſe of thoſe paſſages that ſpeak plainly on the ſame ſubject, and which is ſurely more reaſonable than to put ſuch a ſenſe upon it as beſt ſuits our own ſcheme, and then to reſolve all the plain texts into it, becauſe they do not otherwiſe agree with our ſentiments. By this rule, then, we are not confined to this dark paſſage, nor to any ſingle paſſage, to know the ſcripture ſenſe of the new birth. The ſcriptures frequently ſpeak of it, and conſider all as being born again who receive the goſpel, or this ſpiritual diſpenſation in the love of it; all who believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and work righteouſneſs, as appears from the following texts: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Chriſt Jeſus[a]," "being born again, not of corruptible ſeed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever[b]." "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteouſneſs is born of him[c]." "Whoſoever

[a] Gal. iii. 26.—[b] 1 Peter i. 23.—[c] 1 John ii. 29.

believeth that Jeſus is the Chriſt, is born of God[a]." Paul tells the Corinthians, "he had begotten them again, through the goſpel[b]." Peter tells the Chriſtians, "they were begotten again, through the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead[c]." Theſe paſſages ſurely ſpeak ſufficiently plain, and are eaſy to be underſtood; there is no alluſion to any inward dark work upon the mind, to any ſecret whiſperings, or private interpretations; on the contrary, they affirm that the man who ſincerely believes the word of God, and embraceth Chriſt, with all his affections, as the Meſſiah, is born again by faith; by believing the goſpel he is begotten again to a hope of life, i. e. a new ſcene opens to his view, he now acts upon new principles, is inſpired by new motives, he has new purſuits and new pleaſures, and his affections are fixed upon new objects. In truth, he is, in all reſpects, a new man; old things with him are paſſed away, and the more he is influenced by theſe proſpects, and beholds the glories of the world to come, the more he is alive unto God and dead to the vanities of this world, over which he gains a victory, even by his faith, i. e. faith in a future life, as revealed and exemplified by Chriſt.

Again: "The manifeſtation of the ſpirit is given to every man to profit withal[d]." There are few texts more perverted than this. The Apoſtle is here ſpeaking of the miraculous gifts of the ſpirit, and in order to quell that envy and confuſion which prevailed in the Corinthian Church reſpecting them, aſſures thoſe to whom he writes that theſe gifts were not given for any individual aggrandiſement, but for the edification of the whole body. For example: Suppoſing a member poſſeſſed the gift of

[a] 2 John v. 1.—[b] 1 Cor. iv. 15.—[c] 1 Peter i. 3.—[d] 1 Cor. xii. 7.

tongues, it was not for himſelf, nor for them that believed, but "for them that believed not," that they might be converted to the goſpel. But inſtead of applying the text in this rational manner, according to the Apoſtle's meaning, (viz. to thoſe poſſeſſed of gifts in the Corinthian Church) it is applied to all mankind in general, and hence concluded that every man in his natural ſtate has a meaſure of the ſpirit given him to profit withal. This is ſo obvious a perverſion of all that is ſaid or intended, that it ſeems unneceſſary to ſay any more upon it.

Laſtly, It is contended by ſome that the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit are ſtill the privilege of the real Chriſtian, and are to be expected and enjoyed through the exerciſe of faith and prayer. This is a conſideration of ſome importance, and as ſuch we ſhall offer upon it a few remarks.

In the firſt place, the baptiſm of the ſpirit was not originally received by this means: the firſt Chriſtians did not expect it, nor ſeek for it, through the exerciſe of faith and prayer, it was a free gift given them by heaven to anſwer a certain purpoſe, and generally was received by the laying on of the Apoſtles' hands. Cornelius and his friends received it while hearing Peter preach, even before he had joined the Church by baptiſm, ſo that he had no opportunity of ſeeking it by any means whatever.

Secondly, When we ſee the uſe and propriety of any ſubject propoſed to us, we feel a double pleaſure to what we do when we only receive or aſſent to any thing as being true, merely becauſe it is revealed as ſuch, without ſeeing its utility. This obſervation applies in a ſtriking manner to the

ſubject before us. We are told that the gifts of the ſpirit were given to comfort the diſciples' minds, to lead them into all truth, and to aid the ſpread and confirmation of the goſpel. But before this laſt end could be effected, when the ſtate of the Apoſtles' minds is conſidered previous to their illumination on the day of Pentecoſt, we ſee not only the uſe, but the neceſſity of the aſſiſtance of the ſpirit, for they, in common with the reſt of their countrymen, were filled with the idea of a temporal Meſſiah, who ſhould aſſert and eſtabliſh the independence of their nation, raiſe it to ſplendor and dignity, and reign glorioufly upon the throne of his father David; and though their Maſter had told them plainly and repeatedly, that "his kingdom was not of this world, and that he ſhould be taken from them," "be delivered to his enemies, and be by them crucified, and that the third day he ſhould riſe again," &c. &c. and though they ſaw all this actually take place, yet "they truſted that it had been he who ſhould have delivered Iſrael [a];" and though he roſe from the dead, according to his declaration, while he was yet with them they ſtill did not underſtand, but enquired if he would "at this time reſtore again the kingdom to Iſrael [b]?"

With minds thus prejudiced, it was impoſſible they ſhould preach to others what they themſelves did not underſtand. But ſuppoſing they had applied themſelves to the underſtanding of the true nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom in the moſt earneſt manner, and ſuppoſing they had all made equal

a Luke xxiv. 21.—b Acts i. 6.

progreſs, a ſuppoſition extremely improbable, a great part of their lives muſt have been conſumed before they, by the uſual operation of common principles, could have been fit to preach it to the world, and this delay would have been attended with this great additional diſadvantage, that the facts and circumſtances which had excited ſo much attention, through length of time would have died away; or, what was ſtill worſe, would have been unſupported by evidence. But in the courſe of their ſtudies, had any of them ſo miſapprehended the truth, that they became not of one mind, and all did not ſpeak the ſame things, then, of courſe, all would have fallen to the ground. To ſay nothing of the ſupport of which the firſt Chriſtians ſtood in need, to be able to abide the fiery trials that awaited them, we ſee the abſolute neceſſity of the baptiſm of the ſpirit, to enable the Apoſtles to take advantage of all recent circumſtances, and without loſs of time to preach the goſpel with effect to the ſons of men. It enlightened their minds, and gave them ſuch an underſtanding of their Maſter's work and character, and of the nature and ſpirit of the diſpenſation, that from the day of Pentecoſt they totally abandoned all their ideas of a temporal or worldly Meſſiah, and devoted themſelves entirely to the work of the miniſtry, to the glory of God, and the good of men.

Thirdly, The gifts of the ſpirit were not given to produce moral effects in thoſe that received them, farther than that in proportion as the mind is enlightened and eſtabliſhed in truth, the ſtronger its confidence, and the fairer its proſpects will be;

and thus it will be furniſhed with ſtronger motives to purity, virtue, and benevolence. That motives only influenced the minds of the firſt Chriſtians in common concerns, though baptized with the ſpirit, is abundantly evident from their conduct. We find the Apoſtles frequently uſing very ſtrong language, when reproving ſome of the early Chriſtians for acting inconſiſtently with their hopes and calling, and in a manner unworthy of their privileges. This plainly ſhews that the ſpirit did not produce in them any moral effects in an arbitrary way: from all which it appears that the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit were ſent to enlighten the Apoſtles' minds, to enable them to open the nature of the kingdom of the Meſſiah, to make known the good-will of God to his creatures, and to confirm it to them by the moſt poſitive and ſtriking evidence.

We apprehend theſe were the plain ends for which the ſpirit was given, and theſe ends were all clearly effected; and as they are, by the bleſſing of Divine Providence, handed down to us in a plain convincing manner, if we attend to them in light and uprightneſs, we ſhall feel an equal intereſt and enjoyment in the advantages of the extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit with the firſt Chriſtians, though we receive them not in the ſame manner. The difference upon the whole between them and us may not be ſo great as is imagined, eſpecially as one end of the gifts of the ſpirit, not mentioned here, was to give ſatisfaction to the diſciples' minds, that Chriſt had entered upon his reward: the out-pouring of the ſpirit, according to his promiſe,

afforded the compleateſt evidence that he was now ſeated on his Father's throne, and partook and diſpenſed of his fulneſs, and in this particular we, of this day, have equal advantages. But if, after all that has been ſaid, people will ſtill contend for the ſame bleſſing in the ſame manner, they muſt give the ſame evidence, ſhew the ſame ſigns, work the ſame miracles, before they can be credited or liſtened to with attention.

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER IV.

DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING in our remarks upon the doctrine of the ſpirit aſſerted that faith is not a ſupernatural gift, as is generally maintained, we ſhall now make ſome obſervations on thoſe texts that are ſuppoſed to ſpeak that language.

" By grace are ye ſaved, through faith, and that not of yourſelves, it is the gift of God, not of works, leſt any man ſhould boaſt." The Apoſtle, in this connection, endeavours to impreſs the minds of the Epheſians[a] with a ſenſe of their great obligations to God, in their being ſaved from a ſtate of groſs ignorance and vice, ſolely by his mercy, and urges it upon their attention that they were ſaved not by works, or any purity, or exertions of their own, but tells them, " by grace are ye ſaved, through faith," or believing, " and that not of yourſelves; it is the gift of God," and you enjoy it freely by believing it, or receiving it by faith.

The words in the text, " it is the gift of God," refer only to grace, and not to faith; for believing is only the channel or means by which the grace of God is received, or conveyed into the heart. This ſeems plainly to be his meaning, and it is perfectly

[a] Epheſians ii. 8.

conſonant with the reſt of the ſcriptures; that the goſpel, or ſalvation, or the grace of God, or eternal life, are the gift of God, but men only are ſaved by it as they believe and obey it. "To another, faith by the ſame ſpirit[a]." The Corinthian Church poſſeſſed extraordinary gifts of the ſpirit, for the edification of the body, and for the ſpread and eſtabliſhment of the goſpel; but through the envy of ſome, and the imprudence of others, much confuſion had been bred in the Church. The Apoſtle, appriſed of this, interferes, and gives them ſome uſeful inſtructions for the right uſe of theſe gifts, ſhews them the impropriety of their former conduct, and gives them to underſtand that theſe gifts were not diſpenſed for any individual diſtinction, but to be ſubſervient to the propagation of the goſpel. "For," ſays the Apoſtle in this ſame epiſtle, "tongues are for a ſign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

The text under conſideration refers to that extraordinary gift of the ſpirit that enabled the poſſeſſor thereof to work miracles, as will appear more evidently if we follow the Apoſtle's reaſoning into the next chapter, where, ſpeaking of charity, he ſays, "and though I had all faith, ſo that I could remove mountains, and had not charity, I ſhould be as nothing;" which demonſtrates that he refers to that peculiar faith, that ſupernatural impulſe upon the mind, which ſeems always to have preceded the working of a miracle, and which was the immediate gift of the ſpirit, and not to that faith or belief which conſtitutes a man a Chriſtian. That he did not mean faith in the common accep-

[a] 1 Cor. xii. 9.

tation of the term, is evident, for this the Corinthians already poſſeſſed as a body, and this therefore could not be the cauſe of their difference; hence it appears, that this paſſage is nothing to the purpoſe, that it does not apply to the ſubject. But if it be ſtill inſiſted upon, then we come to this concluſion, that the reſt of the Church, even thoſe who poſſeſſed extraordinary gifts of another kind, for equally beneficial purpoſes, had not ſaving faith, though members of the Church, and thus illuſtriouſly diſtinguiſhed; a moſt abſurd concluſion indeed, and which certainly proves too much.

"Buried with him in baptiſm, wherein alſo ye are riſen with him through the faith, or belief of the operation of God, who hath raiſed him from the dead [a]." The Coloſſians are here aſſured, that as they have been buried with Chriſt, by the figure of baptiſm, ſo by the ſame figure they may conſider themſelves as riſen with him from the grave through their faith in the power of God. The operation of God here ſpoken of has not the leaſt alluſion to any work upon the mind, but to the energy or power that God exerted when he raiſed Chriſt from the dead, and which to them was a ſure evidence of their own reſurrection. It is ſomewhat ſtrange that any thinking perſon ſhould infer that the operation of God, in raiſing Chriſt from the grave, was an inward work of faith in the believing Coloſſians.

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Chriſt, not only to believe on him, but alſo to ſuffer for his ſake [b]." Any perſon paying the leaſt attention to the context, will readily ſee that the Apoſtle is encouraging the Philippians to bear up, and not be afraid of their perſecutors, and that he ſpeaks here not

[a] Coloſ. ii. 12.—[b] Phil. i. 29.

of faith, but of ſufferings, and ſeems to mean no more than this, " you are not only called upon, or have an opportunity given you to believe, but alſo to ſuffer for his name; therefore be not aſhamed, nor afraid of the teſtimony of our Lord." But ſuppoſe, for argument's ſake, that faith is here called a gift, by the ſame explanation ſuffering is a gift alſo, for believing and ſuffering are exactly parallel expreſſions in this text. What is the natural concluſion, but that the cruel perſecutions of the Church, which originated in the malice and rage of their enemies, are transferred from them to the holy ſpirit; thus making the wickedneſs of evil men, and the ſufferings of the innocent Chriſtians, equally the gift of the ſpirit with believing. Surely this reaſoning is too groſs for any ſenſible perſon to admit, for ſuffering is never reckoned among the gifts of the ſpirit. Thus having noticed the principal texts that are commonly brought to prove the ſentiments we are now combating, we ſhall beg leave to add, to what has already been ſaid, a few general remarks.a

a Upon reviewing the foregoing we find that we have unintentionally omitted two paſſages of ſcripture, which are adduced to the ſame purpoſe, though, as it appears to us, with leſs plauſibility. Heb. xii. 2. " Looking unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith." It is evident, from conſidering the context, that the Apoſtle means no more than that Jeſus was the perſon whom the Father choſe to be the firſt publiſher of the important doctrine of a future life, and to confirm it in his own perſon by riſing from the grave. Theſe words can never be fairly conſtrued that faith comes in conſequence of any internal workings of the ſpirit. This ſenſe can only be diſcovered in them by thoſe who are previouſly determined to believe the doctrine.

The ſecond paſſage is James i. 17. " Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," &c. This text can have no force, if faith be not conſidered as the gift of God; and that it is not a gift, we hope we have in this letter ſufficiently proved. From the context it cannot be made to appear that James conſidered it in this light. Neither of theſe paſſages, indeed, claim any notice here, only ſo far as it is deſirable that no occaſion ſhould be given to aſſert, that we have wilfully omitted any text, generally quoted in defence of the doctrine we wiſh to oppoſe.

The doctrines that man naturally cannot think a good thought, or work a good work, without the previous work of the ſpirit on his heart; that the ſpirit is offered and given for this end; that "faith is the gift of God," &c. &c. ſeem to us, 1ſt Contrary to the known powers of human nature.—2dly. To all our ideas of the juſtice and goodneſs of God.—And 3dly. To all the principles upon which he has ever revealed himſelf to his creatures.

Firſt, Contrary to the known powers of human nature. For it appears that man, by virtue of his reaſonable faculties, is fully capable of underſtanding any truth or fact that is plain, clear, and evident, whether natural or revealed; and farther, that he is capable of being affected with thoſe truths, or facts, according as they may reſpect his ſituation; that he can be wrought upon by circumſtances, or repreſentations, whether good or bad; that his affections are more or leſs pure or impure, according to the nature of the objects upon which they are fixed; that men are naturally filled with gratitude, love, and admiration, when they behold and benefit by diſintereſted goodneſs in their fellow creatures, and that theſe ſentiments lead them to act agreeably to the dictates of theſe obligations, to diſcharge or return them, if poſſible. If man can feel and act in this manner, man with man, how much more ſo with God, on whom he continually depends, in whom he "lives, and moves, and has his being," who conſtantly ſupplies all his returning wants, and from whom are all his future expectations? Here is a far greater force of obligation, that will of courſe, when rightly attended to, produce much ſtronger feelings, and naturally excite

an earneſt wiſh and endeavour to return or acknowledge them.

Again: It is evident that man is ſo conſtituted at preſent that his ruling paſſion is ſelf-love, and that ſelf-preſervation is the firſt law of his nature, as well as that of all other creatures. If danger threatens and approaches him, his firſt concern is to look for a way of eſcape, and whether the threatning danger be of this world or of that which is to come. Only let him ſee it, and make him ſufficiently ſenſible of it, and it will on theſe natural principles, and in this rational way, as effectually work upon his mind as the common notion of the work of the ſpirit. It is true, indeed, that oppoſite influences may ſo fully poſſeſs the mind as to prevent theſe things from producing their natural good effects. But then this remark holds equally good on any ſcheme; for few will argue that even the ſpirit works *irreſiſtibly* upon the mind. In ſhort, the hope of reward and the fear of puniſhment, but principally the latter, are the great operating principles upon the mind of man.

Secondly, Theſe doctrines are oppoſite to all our ideas of the juſtice and goodneſs of God. It is an eſtabliſhed ſentiment among mankind, that the Deity is poſſeſſed of all poſſible perfection, conſequently that he is both juſt and good. But that which would be unjuſt and unworthy in a good man, and diſgraceful to him as ſuch, cannot be juſt in God. To ſuppoſe that God brings man (the moſt diſtinguiſhed of his lower works) into exiſtence, or that he ſuffered him by any means to be brought into exiſtence, under a neceſſity of continually ſinning againſt him, without being able to

his hand or foot in that which is good; and that in this ſituation God ſhould make it his duty, and call upon man to obey him with uprightneſs; that it ſhould be his duty to love God, when at the ſame time it is impoſſible for him to do it; to hear and believe in God, yet that he has no power to hear and believe on him; and that nevertheleſs God will ſeverely puniſh him for his diſobedience, as the ſcriptures abundantly declare; ſuch conduct ſeems to us utterly unworthy of the juſtice and goodneſs of God, and fills us with horror and diſguſt. He that can believe ſuch things of an infinitely good and perfect Being, let him believe them. Sure we are, that if any man was ſo ſeverely to puniſh any of his helpleſs family, or dependent creatures, for not doing what was impoſſible for them to do, he would, upon reflection, ſeem a tyrant to himſelf, while he appeared a monſter to all around him. But on the ſuppoſition that God has given ſufficient evidence of his goodneſs, to entitle him to the truſt, the love, the obedience of all his creatures, and that he requires nothing of them but what they are able to do, then all theſe hard views of the Deity vaniſh from our minds.

Thirdly, Theſe doctrines are contrary to all the principles upon which God has ever revealed himſelf to his creatures. The ſcriptures conſtantly repreſent to us, that it is man's greateſt happineſs, as well as intereſt, to obey God; that he of all others is the only object worthy of his ſupreme conſideration and affection as a rational being; that God is able to make him the beſt, the wiſeſt, and the happieſt: thus, if poſſible, to attract him by the moſt endearing views, by laying hold of ſome of the

ſtrongeſt principles of his nature, for ſurely it is one of man's firſt deſires to be happy. This is his firſt and laſt concern, his earlieſt hope, his lateſt prayer, his conſtant purſuit through life; and whatever he underſtands will moſt enſure him that end, that he will unceaſingly purſue, if it be through ten thouſand difficulties. The principle of intereſt is likewiſe appealed to; that principle which ſo powerfully ſways and influences the human mind. The ſcriptures, as above noted, offer the greateſt good, the greateſt advantage, here and hereafter, to godlineſs; they ſhew that "it is profitable to all things; having the promiſe of the life that now is, and alſo of that which is to come."

Again: God has conſtantly revealed himſelf as the future diſpenſer of equitable rewards and puniſhments. This can never agree with the idea of the total inability of man to do the will of God; for he that is accountable for his actions muſt have the liberty of acting, or his actions are not properly his own, and he cannot be puniſhed for them upon the principles of juſtice. The ſcriptures are expreſs on this ſubject, that "every man ſhall be rewarded according to his works." What we do by invincible neceſſity are not voluntary works, and cannot by the above rule ſubject us to pain or puniſhment.

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE doctrine of Election we believe to be plainly revealed in ſcripture, but from this we draw very different concluſions from thoſe that are too often drawn from it. We propoſed to give you our reaſons for relinquiſhing one doctrine and taking up another We ſhall ſtill adhere to the ſame rule, only we muſt remark, once for all, that we do not pretend to enter at large into theſe ſubjects, or to ſay all that might be ſaid upon every ſingle text. This would be tedious for us to write, and too dull for you to read. We ſhall merely give ſome of our principal reaſons, and what we think ſupported by the ſacred writers.

When we take a view of the great leading principles of the ſcriptures, we find, whether we conſider them from the end to the beginning, or from the beginning to the end, that Chriſt, in a certain ſenſe, is the ſubſtance of all. In him all the purpoſes of God were treaſured up; all were revealed in him. "He hath made known the will of the Father: all the promiſes are yea and amen in Chriſt." "He is the Head of all things to his Church;" "is Heir of all things;" "has a Name

given him above every name." "He is the only way of acceſs unto God," and without controverſy is the firſt elect of God; whom "God gave a ranſom for all, to be teſtified in due time;" "whom he hath ſet to be a light to the Gentiles," and "given (not to a few, but) for ſalvation to the ends of the earth, that all fleſh might ſee the ſalvation of God."

We ſhall notice ſome of the moſt ſtriking inſtances of election. The firſt is the call of Abraham. Was he choſen from his country and his father's houſe that he only ſhould be bleſſed, and his country and his father's houſe left to periſh? No, this is not the account, but juſt the contrary, viz. that in him, and in his ſeed, "all the families of the earth might be bleſſed." The calling of Abraham ſeems to have been from a moſt benevolent deſign, that, in making of him a great nation, the name and government of God might be known and preſerved throughout thoſe early, dark ages, when the knowledge of his providence was in danger of being totally loſt, till ſuch time as his purpoſes ſhould be more fully opened. The call of Abraham, then, all the circumſtances conſidered, is a moſt ſtriking inſtance of *election*. The end of his calling, as avowed by God himſelf in the promiſes made to him, ſhews that it was not, as has been obſerved, for his particular good, or for any confined purpoſe, but in order that all the families of the earth might be bleſſed through him. Let it here be obſerved, that as this is the great ground-work or cauſe of all the peculiar privileges and diſtinctions that were conferred upon Abraham's poſterity as a nation, or upon any family or individual thereof,

theſe privileges and diſtinctions ought all to be referred to the ſame principle, all being ſubſervient to the ſame end. Following, then, this fair conſequence, we can eaſily account for the different diſcriminations of character that took place among the Jews. If Iſaac, the heir of the promiſe, had two ſons, and the promiſe was to run in one only, it was ſolely at the good pleaſure of God in which it ſhould be. Jacob was not choſen for his goodneſs, nor was Eſau rejected for his wickedneſs; for, before the children had either done good or evil, God, according to his own counſel, choſe Jacob, and rejected Eſau; preferred the younger to the elder, that his purpoſe might ſtand without the aid of human ſagacity, for probably Iſaac would have choſen the elder. This choice ſeems not ſo much to reſpect the individuals as their poſterity, for, reſpecting any worldly proſperity, Eſau ſeemed as great a man as Jacob; and with regard to their felicity in another world, even if they had known any thing about it, the good of both (according to the promiſe in which *all* were to be bleſſed) was equally conſidered.

As to the caſe of Pharaoh, that he was not a veſſel of wrath appointed by the decree of God to deſtruction, but that he fitted himſelf by his iniquitous treatment of the innocent Iſraelites, appears from the Apoſtle's account of the matter; for he ſays, " God endured with much long-ſuffering the veſſels of wrath," &c. Now for God to endure what he himſelf appointed, implies a contradiction. It ſhould rather appear, that their deſtruction was not decreed, but on account of their impenitence, and that they could, and had time to repent, thro'

"his long-ſuffering of them," or why this expreſſion? However, be this as it may, it is plain their puniſhment was of a temporal nature, and did not refer to a ſtate of ſuffering after death, for about this they knew nothing.

As among the Jews a number of perſons were elected for particular purpoſes, we deem it unneceſſary to notice them all. Let one inſtance ſuffice as a ſpecimen of all the reſt. Jeremiah was choſen from the womb to be a prophet; not that he only ſhould be ſaved, and the reſt left to periſh, but it was for the general good; "that he might ſpeak unto the houſe of Iſrael all the words of the Lord, that they might be ſaved," which is the proper end of all prophets and of all meſſages, to ſave and do good, if they are attended to. The whole nation of the Jews, the offspring of Abraham, though abounding with obnoxious characters, were conſidered as "the choſen of God," "the peculiar people of God," "the elect of God," "thoſe only whom he had known of all the nations of the earth." But this evidently referred only to their national advantages, to their temporal privileges as a people, and chiefly becauſe "unto them were committed the oracles of God." As reſpecting futurity, they knew little or nothing about it; and when they grievouſly ſinned againſt their God, he deſtroyed them, and delivered them to their enemies, who led them into captivity, &c. In ſhort, they were no more than inſtruments in his hand for the good of the whole world.

The Apoſtles were choſen "before the foundation of the world" to be "able Miniſters of the New

Covenant," not for any individual excluſive benefit to themſelves, but that they might " preach the goſpel to every creature," and carry the glad tidings of ſalvation to the four corners of the earth. Much more might we add to the ſame purpoſe, as " that Chriſt died for all," " gave himſelf a ranſom for all," " gave his life for the world," " taſted death for every man," &c. &c. which inclines us to believe that it is the will of God that " *all* ſhould come to the knowledge of the truth, and be ſaved." We rejoice in the conſideration that the time will come when it ſhall be fully ſeen that all the peculiarities of character, gifts, and callings among men, had an immediate reference to this great end.

All who believe the radical corruption of human nature contend that man is ſo helpleſs that he can deſire nothing that is good, ſo that the firſt inclination or motion to that which is good is as much the work of the ſpirit upon the heart as what they call ſanctification and perſevering grace. It plainly follows, by this rule, that all ſerious characters, of whatever denomination, have been equally wrought upon by the ſpirit, are all equally the elect, for they could not of themſelves, by the force of any motives whatever, change their old conduct for a better. What is the conſequence? Plainly this, either that the favour of God is far more extenſive than their ſcheme admits, or that the ſpirit, which was given at firſt to lead into all truth, and of courſe led all in one way, and to be of the ſame mind, now acts quite differently, by leading men into error and contention. One is now drawn to be a Methodiſt, another a Calviniſt, and a third a Quaker, and ſo on; all led and converted by the

ſame ſpirit, for it is already ſettled that they could not change themſelves.

Thus, inſtead of the ſpirit leading into truth, to be of the ſame mind, and to walk in the ſame way, it is made to be the author of confuſion, by leading men to think and act quite differently, and to oppoſe one another with ſtrife and bitterneſs. But "God is not the author of confuſion, but of peace," and cannot produce in men what is ſo oppoſite to himſelf. But it is affirmed that theſe differences are from the bewildered imaginations of men, and not from the ſpirit of truth. In that caſe then, who are right? who are the elect? They are not mentioned by name in the ſcriptures, and all theſe different religious characters lay equal claim to the ſame things, profeſs the ſame marks and inward evidences, and have the ſame moral and religious rectitude to ſupport their pretenſions. From the confuſion, darkneſs, and contradiction that reign in the different prevailing ſyſtems of religion, it is moſt reaſonable to conclude that the ſpirit of God has nothing to do in the matter, and that men are what they are by their education, by the operation of circumſtances, or from the different religious inſtruction imparted to them; for if they were led by one ſpirit of truth, and all drank at the true and only ſource of religious information, the ſcriptures, they would be of one mind in all great leading truths, for "Chriſt is not divided." There is one fact that had on our minds deciſive influence, which is, that the Apoſtles make no ſuch diſtinctions, they do not uſe ſuch language as modern Preachers, who harangue upon proviſion being made for *part* only, of Chriſt dying for the elect only,

&c. &c. and ſurely their example ought to be of the firſt authority. Theſe Preachers readily confeſs that they do not know who are, and who are not elected; they invite all, preſs all to come in general terms. But whilſt thus employed, they ought to recollect, that, according to their ſcheme, the inability of man is ſuch that he cannot attend to their admonitions. On their own principles, therefore, they labour to no purpoſe, as the ſpirit only can quicken and bring in the elect.

But it is urged by ſome, in the juſtification of this proceeding, that the ſpirit may make uſe of them as inſtruments for that purpoſe, a ſuppoſition which is not authorized by their ſyſtem, ſo that it muſt be confeſſed there is a degree of uncertainty in it, which ought not to be, and it is well known that a great many of them have the moſt ſerious ſcruples on this head, and that not a few able Calviniſt Miniſters have entirely left off calling ſinners to do what they could not do, judging that work to be the peculiar province of the ſpirit. Surely a doctrine of ſuch importance as the reprobation of a great part of the human race ought not to ſtand upon inferences, however ſtrong, or on ſingle paſſages that may well bear another meaning. The doctrine is ſo unworthy of a good God, and ſo diſhonourable to him, and of ſuch importance to men, that it ought to be ſupported by the cleareſt and moſt indiſputable evidence; an evidence that all might ſee and feel before it be admitted as a truth.

But the advocates for the doctrine in queſtion loſe the pain that naturally fills the feeling mind in reflecting on the conſequences of their ſyſtem, namely, that the greateſt part of the human race

are brought into exiſtence without any will of their own, and by a chain of fixed events, or by the effects of Adam's ſin, (a crime they had no concern in) hurried through life to eternal perdition, independent of their good or evil conduct, by virtue of eternal decrees, by conſidering themſelves as being ſafe, elected, and born to eternal joy. And though unpleaſant miſgivings may at times diſturb their peace, yet they ſtifle the voice of reaſon and of humanity, and eaſe their minds by contending that God, as a Sovereign, has a right to do as he pleaſes, as if there were a neceſſary connection between abſolute ſovereignty and mercileſs power. It is true, indeed, that among men theſe characters are too frequently united, but we know that the ſcriptures uniformly ſpeak of God as being "good unto all," and declare that "his tender mercies are over all his works," that "he is kind to the evil and to the good," and is perfectly amiable beyond all our conceptions. God being perfectly juſt can do nothing unjuſt: if he haspre-doomed a great part of his creatures to deſtruction, *that* may be right; but is it right to ſport with their miſeries, and to inſult them in their low and fallen condition, by calling them to believe this or that, to believe and obey his will, or be damned for not obeying, when he knows that they have no power to comply with the ſmalleſt injunction? Is this right, or good, or juſt?

Theſe obſervations are not the effects of prejudice, but the reſult of very ſerious inquiry. Many of us were once firm believers in this particular ſcheme, and, to be conſiſtent with ourſelves, conſidered the helpleſs infant of the non-elect, who

died at a week old, as being equally an heir of hell and of eternal torments as the old and grey-headed ſinner, who went laden with iniquity down to the grave; for if men are condemned by eternal decrees, neither years nor crimes make any difference. Men are too apt to ſpeak of God as if he were actuated by ſuch paſſions as too often ſway themſelves; but it is good for us that "his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." The difference is immenſe. It is certain that "God is no reſpecter of perſons," but has good-will towards all men; and there is no evidence, either from ſcripture or reaſon, that any of the human race ſhall be loſt in eternal perdition by virtue of eternal decrees. The firſt wiſh of every feeling parent is for the happineſs of his offspring. The whole race of men are the offspring of God; and if he were only as good as men, depraved as they are repreſented to be, the ſpontaneous deſires of his heart (ſpeaking after the manner of men) would be for the eternal happineſs of all his creatures.

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER VI.

DEAR FRIEND,

THE next ſubject on which we propoſed to treat is the doctrine of the Satisfaction of Chriſt, and how much ſoever it may be extolled by its friends, there are no ſuch words as "the ſatisfaction of Chriſt," or that "Chriſt died to ſatisfy Divine Juſtice," or "that he paid the debt due to ſin for us," or "that he died in our ſtead," or "that he by his ſufferings reconciled an angry God to his offending creatures." We repeat it, there are no ſuch words to be found in the New Teſtament. We know, indeed, that there are a number of texts cited for the purpoſe of proving this doctrine, but upon cloſe examination we found that, in fact, they neither ſpeak the ſame language or the ſame ſentiments. For example, where can any man diſcover, in the New Teſtament, that Chriſt by his blood quenched the flaming juſtice of God? or that he died in our ſtead, or by his ſufferings reconciled his angry Father to his offending creatures? &c. &c. The generality of religious people are ſo accuſtomed to hear theſe ſentiments, that they never diſpute but that the ſcriptures are full of them. It would lead us far beyond our deſign to enter into a minute

examination of ſuch texts as the following: "Chriſt died for us," "was ſacrificed for us," "bore our ſins in his own body upon the tree," "was made ſin for us," "ye are bought with a price," &c. &c. They are in a great meaſure figurative, and are borrowed from the ceremonial law of the Jews, or from the Jewiſh ſcriptures. It is urged that the expreſſion of "Chriſt bearing our ſins," has a pointed alluſion to the ſcape-goat under the law, which bore away upon his head the ſins of the congregation of Iſrael into an unknown land, and that, in the ſame manner, Chriſt by his goſpel bears away, or removes the ſins of the world; and in confirmation of this idea, it is ſaid that when our Lord was healing all that were ſick, the Evangeliſt applied it as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Iſaias the prophet, "himſelf took our infirmities and bare our ſickneſs." Now it is plain he did not bear the palſy, fevers, and other diſorders, in his own perſon, in their ſtead, but that he removed them, and that theſe were merely figurative alluſions to practiſes mentioned in the Old Teſtament, will further appear, if it be conſidered that there are a number of texts in the New Teſtament that cannot be underſtood but in this mode of interpretation: as for inſtance, "ye are bought with a price." If we are to ſuppoſe either God or Chriſt the buyer, and his blood the price with which Chriſtians are bought, the queſtion will be aſked, of whom are they bought? To ſay that Chriſt, by his ſufferings, bought them of himſelf, is nonſenſe, that he bought them of God is contrary to all ſcripture language, which invariably ſays that "he brings us to God," "redeems us to God," &c. and not of God. Some enthuſiaſts,

indeed, will ſay, that " he bought them of the Devil," and thus make God bargaining with him, as it were for the deliverance of his own creatures from death, and thus exalt the Devil to be nearly as powerful as the Deity. This ſurely is too abſurd to deſerve any attention. How then is this language to be underſtood but upon the principle above ſtated? The very idea of Chriſt dying to appeaſe his angry Father, or to ſatisfy his injured juſtice, repreſents God in an odious point of view, as ſo inflexibly auſtere that he would remit nothing, but would have the uttermoſt farthing, a character that is deteſted amongſt men; while God the Son is repreſented as compaſſionate and merciful, and every way amiable, enduring ſo much to appeaſe the wrath of God, and to ſave ſinners. But are not God the Son and God the Spirit as pure and holy as the Father? conſequently muſt not they equally hate ſin, and be as juſtly offended at it? and who is to ſatisfy them? or if they be conſidered as being all one God, then God the Son died to ſatisfy himſelf, which is abſurd to ſuppoſe.

Again: If they be all one God, then the Father muſt have been as merciful as the Son, and did not want ſatisfying. But it is argued by ſome, that Chriſt is only conſidered here reſpecting his human nature; while others conſider him as properly God and Man, making one Chriſt, and that nothing leſs would atone to Infinite Juſtice for infinite ſin; to ſay nothing of the abſurdity of ſuppoſing a finite creature capable of committing or doing any thing infinite, or of the great injuſtice of God's puniſhing *any* of his creatures in a future judgment, after he had received infinite ſatisfaction for *all* of-

fences. When we have aſked the friends of this doctrine if God really bled and died for the ſins of the world? they have been obliged to pauſe, till common ſenſe came in to their relief. Seriouſly to aſſert that the Deity, who is an immortal, infinite, incomprehenſible Spirit, could bleed and die by any means, much leſs by the violence of men, atoms of the duſt, is too monſtrous an aſſertion to be ſeriouſly believed even by the greateſt enthuſiaſt. If the Godhead then did not ſuffer, it was only human nature that ſuffered; and could human nature, however pure, that is only finite, by any ſufferings render an infinite ſatisfaction to Infinite Juſtice? No, it is a plain contradiction. But ſome are fond of extolling the juſtice of God at the certain expence of his other perfections. But ſurely, without going ſo far, God has not forgotten to exhibit proper views of his juſtice. Let any man diſpaſſionately conſider the deſtruction of the world by the deluge of waters; of Sodom and Gomorrah, by fire from heaven; of Pharaoh and his hoſt in the red ſea; of the Iſraelites in the wilderneſs, for diſobedience; of the nations of the Canaanites, for their idolatries; and laſtly, the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and the diſperſion of the Jews, with a number of other facts that might be mentioned, and he will ſee that God has not left himſelf without witneſs on this head, but "has gotten himſelf a name through all the earth," and "is greatly to be feared[a]." But when we add to theſe, the general judgment to come, "when all fleſh muſt appear before the judgment-

[a] To theſe hiſtorical facts may be added the doctrine contained in the New Teſtament, that the whole race of men are brought into a ſtate of affliction and death by the offence of their fœderal head. The juſtice of God cannot be more clearly manifeſted than in this effect of Adam's tranſgreſſion.

ſeat of Chriſt," when the wicked will meet with a righteous ſentence of condemnation, of everlaſting puniſhment, he will ſurely find that God has given the moſt ample ſatisfaction, the moſt complete evidence to the world of his juſtice and holineſs, of his love of righteouſneſs, and his hatred of vice and ſin. The notion of Chriſt's dying in our ſtead, will, upon inſpection, be found extremely weak. It no where appears that man is exempt from any ſufferings that came by the fall on account of the death of Chriſt. In this reſpect his ſituation is exactly the ſame that it was before; he is equally ſubject to pain, affliction, and death, as he would have been had Chriſt never been known in the world. This ſtrange idea originated in the ſuppoſition that but for the death of Chriſt the ſouls of men would have been liable to endure the pains of hell without end, and that, to ſave them from it, Chriſt bore all that vaſt load of ſufferings that was their due. But, happily for us, this wild notion has neither ſcripture nor reaſon for its ſupport. The death of Chriſt, notwithſtanding, may have anſwered ſome very important purpoſes. By means of it he ratified or ſealed with his blood the New Covenant God had made with his people, and eſtabliſhed his own character as the Meſſiah, as well as the truth of his goſpel, by the moſt unparalleled evidence the world had ever ſeen, viz. by his reſurrection from the grave, and his aſcenſion into heaven. Theſe are the pillars which ſupport the goſpel diſpenſation in the world, on which all our hopes of future life and happineſs are founded; and theſe aſſurances of life to come, in themſelves ſo ineſtimable, we could not have had without the death and reſurrection of Chriſt.

Again: By his purity of life, and obedience to death to the will of his Father, and his conſequent glory thereupon, he has by his goſpel, and the power of his own example, furniſhed us with the ſtrongeſt motives to purity and obedience. And as the Captain of our ſalvation was "made perfect by ſufferings," as "he learned obedience by the things that he ſuffered," he was by theſe means properly prepared for his official characters; for "he was tempted in all points like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful High Prieſt over the Houſe of God." But had he not himſelf drank deep of the cup of ſorrow, he could not have felt for his brethren as he can now, nor could they have enjoyed ſuch confidence in the ſympathy of his character; for unleſs he had known pain as Head of the Church, there could have been no correſpondent feelings between him and his members. But as God will cauſe all things finally to work for good to them that love and fear his name,

The preſent ſtormy life may prove the beſt
To fit us for the heav'n of endleſs reſt.

Our preſent circumſtances and experience may be made the means of introducing us to the greater happineſs; if ſo, hence the propriety of our Head treading the loweſt thorny path of human life. Be this as it may, Chriſt having died and riſen again, we know that we have in the preſence of God a Repreſentative of human nature, and that as he is now, ſuch all his faithful ſervants ſhall hereafter be, for "they ſhall ſee him as he is."

It is obvious from the words and experience of religious people who maintain the notion of the infinite atonement of Chriſt, that he is the firſt ob-

ject of their love and regard. To him they feel the greateſt obligation, becauſe he appears the moſt compaſſionate, the moſt amiable; while God, the only real ſource of all goodneſs, is beheld in the back ground, arrayed in aweful vindictive majeſty, not to be appeaſed nor approached but by the ſtreaming ſacrifice of an innocent perſon, upon whom neither law nor juſtice could have any claim. How injurious is this to the God of mercy, whoſe moſt diſtinguiſhing character is love! We are taught and called upon, as the higheſt perfection of our nature in moral excellence, to imitate God; but if he be ſo inflexibly ſevere, ſo unrelenting as this doctrine repreſents him to be, and we were ſtrictly to copy his example, what ſort of characters ſhould we be? It is good for the peace and happineſs of ſociety that the better principles of our nature deſtroy the influence of theſe ſentiments!

How infinitely ſhort does this ſcheme fall of the engaging views which the Bible preſents to us, that "God ſo loved the world that he ſent his only-begotten Son," bringing with him pardon and peace, "that whoſoever believed on him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life." Here God manifeſted his love to the world, that he wanted no ſatisfaction, and gave his Son as an evidence thereof to reconcile his guilty creatures unto himſelf, by delivering them from their ſins. This is the grand condition of favor, that men do ſincerely repent and obey the goſpel of his Chriſt, and are thereby aſſured that, "by a patient continuance in well-doing, they ſhall obtain glory, honor, and eternal life," and this without any other conſideration than that of his own love. How much more comfortable is the idea of

God and all his meſſengers acting ſolely upon one grand principle of affection and benevolence to the ſons of men! thus making the diſplay of his own glory, and the eternal happineſs of the human race, the grand ſpring of all his actions! This view of God rouſes all our generous powers into action, and fills our breaſts with the warming affections of gratitude, love, and admiration of his goodneſs, in which we behold that whether he ſmiles or frowns, threatens or promiſes reward, or puniſhes, all are directed to the ſame great end, and are only ſo many modifications of his love. But as very conſiderable ſtreſs is laid upon thoſe texts that ſpeak of Chriſt as a ſacrifice for ſin, we ſhall examine a little into the ſubject, and ſhew that the Calviniſtic ideas of it are deſtitute of all ſupport either from the recorded facts or analogy of the ſcriptures.

Whatever ſtreſs may be laid on the arguments of ſacrifices and offerings being uſed by the Jews, agreeable to the known and general cuſtom of the Eaſtern nations, on their entering the preſence of ſovereigns or great men, or whether they were intended to operate as a kind of puniſhment upon the groſs-minded Jew, or otherwiſe, we ſhall not at preſent conſider, but obſerve that they were the appointment of God; that he enjoined upon the people of Iſrael, by his ſervant Moſes, all the ſervices of the law, to be by them religiouſly obſerved for the ſeveral purpoſes for which they were inſtituted.—From the attentive cconſideration of theſe things, it will probably appear that the chief end of ſacrifices was to give to the Jews a way of acceſs to God. And as, under their ritual, a number of

things beſides moral guilt rendered a perſon unclean, there was no enjoying temple worſhip, or approaching God, without bringing an offering which ſhould remove theſe ritual tranſgreſſions, according to the appointments of Moſes. But theſe ſacrifices were never conſidered as ſtanding in the place of the ſinner, as victims ſacrificed to ſatisfy or appeaſe the juſtice of God; nor was there any inherent virtue in the blood of the ſlain beaſt that could take away their moral ſins, as the author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews argues, that "the law made nothing perfect," and that "it was not poſſible that the blood of bulls and of goats ſhould take away ſin." Nevertheleſs the Jew, on properly preſenting his offering, had his ſin or uncleanneſs removed. Wherein then lay the advantage? It conſiſted ſolely in his obeying the will of God in theſe appointments. If the Jews lived only as they obeyed the pure requirements of the moral law, then the leaſt ſlip or breach of duty marked their diſgrace, and ſealed their deſtruction, *for a broken law admits of no repentauce*, the penalty muſt be incurred. But God, in condeſcenſion to human infirmity, joined the ceremonial to the moral law, and by the means of ſacrifices was pleaſed to ſhew his mercy to the offending Jews.

Again: "By the law is the knowledge of ſin." In the nature of things any one who ſeeks to be juſtified or accepted by offerings or ſacrifices, or by any name whatever, is taught by that very act the imperfection of his character, and the impurity of his conduct. This practice teaches him humility, and ſpeaks to his heart that he is a ſinner; and if

he ſenſibly feels and underſtands the ſerioufneſs of the addreſs, it is then that he profitably enjoys the mercy that God diſpenſes in theſe mediatory means. But it is contended that theſe ſacrifices were typical, and immediately referred to the great ſacrifice of Chriſt. This we do not mean to controvert, but only to obſerve that it was exactly parallel in its effects with the ſacrifices under the law, i. e. it is, like them, the only way of acceſs unto God: for be it remembered, that we have already ſhewn that the victims under the law were never offered to appeaſe the wrath of God, nor conſidered as ſtanding in the place of the ſinner, nor as being at all poſſeſſed of any inherent virtue capable of removing ſin; and that we have alſo ſhewn that Chriſt was not ſacrificed to the vengeance of God, to remove his wrath, or to appeaſe his juſtice in the ſinner's ſtead. Then to keep the parallel clearly in view, we ſhall obſerve that the ceremonial law anſwered to the Jew juſt what the throne of grace does to the Chriſtian, with this difference, that the ſacrifices under the law were attended with a great deal of labour and expence, on account of their conſtant repetition, and were ſolely confined to the people of Iſrael, and led no farther than the holy of holies within the temple; whereas the ſacrifice of Chriſt is free from all labour and expence, and is every way more excellent, as it "leads into heaven itſelf," and in its advantages extends unto all men, for "he is a propitiation for the ſins of the whole world." Here then you will perceive an eſſential difference between this view of the ſacrifice of Chriſt and that of a vicarious ſacrifice, which bears not the leaſt reſemblance to thoſe of-

fered under the law. Therefore this latter view, however numerous its ſupporters may be, is not founded in juſtice nor ſcripture, for juſtice never can puniſh the innocent for the guilty, and let the guilty go free; while the former perfectly harmoniſes with the ſcripture ſenſe of ſacrifices, and is attended with no contradiction nor abſurdity whatever, and yet affords every good that the ſituation of men requires, or that a vicarious ſacrifice propoſes. Here the ſacrifice of Chriſt is not rendered a nullity on the one hand, nor yet ſubject to the juſt objections of a vicarious ſacrifice on the other, and gives, by the ſpecial appointment of God, to all believers in the goſpel of his Son, in all ages throughout the world, a way of acceſs unto himſelf.

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER VII.

DEAR FRIEND,

ANOTHER important doctrine yet remains to be noticed—the doctrine of the Trinity—a ſubject to which learned men of all parties have paid great attention, and ſo thoroughly inveſtigated as hardly to leave room for any new obſervations. After it has been exhauſted by ſuch ſuperior abilities, it would be highly improper for us to attempt a full diſcuſſion, and this is an apology ſufficient for our only remarking on ſuch parts as may ſhew the conviction of our own minds; for though we have ſeen what both ſides have to ſay, yet we wiſh to obſerve that our minds were nearly made up by attending to the ſcriptures alone, before we had read any of their works. As you are ſo well ſatisfied upon this ſubject, we ſhall avoid being tedious, by confining ourſelves to nearly general remarks

It appears to us, in the moſt ſatisfactory manner, that the ſcriptures do not ſpeak of a Trinity of Perſons in the Godhead, but on the contrary declare, in the moſt deciſive language, that there is but one true, ſelf-exiſtent Being, the Firſt Cauſe of all cauſes; and that, however exalted and dignified

other beings may be, they are all derived from, and dependent on, Him the ſole Author of Univerſal Nature, JEHOVAH, who created the heavens and the earth, who called Abraham, ſpake to Moſes, revealed himſelf to the Prophets, and was worſhipped by the whole Jewiſh Nation as the one true God. The very firſt commandment expreſſes this great ſentiment: "Thou ſhalt have no other gods before me." The word *me* is ſingular, and expreſſive of one perſon only, otherwiſe it would have been, Thou ſhalt have no other gods before *us*.—"Hear, O Iſrael! the Lord your God is *one* Lord" (not three). "Is there any god beſides me? (not *us*) There is no god, I know not any." "I am the Lord, and there is none elſe." "There is no god beſides me." To whom will ye liken me, or ſhall I be equal? ſaith the Holy One" (not holy three). We might tranſcribe great part of the Old Teſtament, where God conſtantly ſpeaks of himſelf as *one* only, and, what is more, the Jews always underſtood him in this ſingular ſenſe, and conſtantly ſpeak of him, and pray to him, as one perſon only. "O thou moſt high God! poſſeſſor of heaven and earth!" "O thou God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob!" and "Thou God of our fathers!" "Hath not one God created us?" &c. &c. This decidedly was the ſentiment and language of the Jewiſh nation, and continues to be ſo amongſt that people until this very day.

Conſidering the Old and New Teſtament equally to contain the revealed mind of God, it is highly reaſonable to ſuppoſe that they could not ſo eſſentially contradict each other, as for one to reveal and inſiſt upon One God only, and the other to reveal Three Gods, equal, eternal Beings. But

we have not to reſt upon ſuppoſition, however reaſonable, for we never find our Lord preaching any ſuch doctrine as that he was the eternal, ſelf-exiſtent God, that made all worlds, or that he was God and Man, &c. The Apoſtles evidently did not underſtand him ſo, for they, like him, never preached to their hearers the bleſſed Trinity, nor Chriſt, the God-Man, or that the eternal God veiled himſelf in human fleſh. Indeed we were ſtruck with the queſtions which unavoidably occurred to our minds. Could the Immortal God become a helpleſs infant? Could God die? Could God be buried? Could a womb or a grave hold Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain? Could he be the infinite, the inconceivably glorious God, and at the ſame time the finite, deſpiſed Man of Nazareth? Surely if this were true, the Apoſtles would not be ſo totally ſilent upon it. They ſurely could preach as well and as plainly as any that followed them. But now it is become ſo fundamental a doctrine that it is ſounded from one end of the land to the other, and he that does not believe it muſt be damned. But if this doctrine had been true, might we not have expected to have ſeen the Apoſtles expreſs the greateſt aſtoniſhment when they diſcovered that he whom they had ſeen poor and deſpiſed, and laſtly put to a ſhameful death, was their God? And how would they not have harangued the Jews on the ſubject, ſhewing them that the lowly Jeſus, in point of real dignity, exceeded all their lofty ideas of a glorious temporal Meſſiah? and, proving this, how could they have appeared ſimple and fooliſh to the wiſe Philoſopher? The offence of the croſs would then have ceaſed. This would have gained

them more honour and more reſpectful attention than the ſimple relation of a man being put to an ignominious death, and raiſed again by the power of God. But in their preaching we find nothing of the ſort; their language uniformly is, "Ye men of Iſrael, hear theſe words: Jeſus of Nazareth, a man approved of God amongſt you by miracles, wonders, and ſigns, which God did by him in the midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know, him being delivered by the determinate counſel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands crucified and ſlain, whom God hath raiſed up, having looſed the pains of death," &c. &c. This manner of ſpeaking exactly correſponded with his life and appearance; and though the Apoſtle who here ſpeaks was juſt divinely inſpired by the deſcent of the Spirit, yet he ſays nothing of Chriſt being God and Man, nothing of his Divine nature. Here is no myſtery whatever, and yet how fit an opportunity for ſo great a diſcovery! But the grand reaſon why the Apoſtles, like modern Preachers, did not conſtantly urge this topic in their preaching, was, that they were not taught it. Their aſſertion that "there is none other God but one;" for "though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many) but to us there is but one God, the Father," ſeems fully to expreſs their ſentiments upon this great ſubject.

The following declarations of our Lord are, in our minds, deciſive. "I came not of myſelf, he ſent me [a]." "The doctrine is not mine, but his who ſent me [b]." "Many works have I ſhewn you from

[a] John viii. 42—vi. 28—xiii. 3.—[b] vi. 16.

my Father [c]." "I have not ſpoken from myſelf, but the Father who ſent me. Himſelf gave me a commandment what I ſhould ſay and what I ſhould ſpeak: even as the Father hath ſpoken unto me, ſo I ſpeak [d]." "I have ſpoken the truth which I have heard from God [e]." "The Son can do nothing of himſelf [f]." "My Father is greater than I [g]." "But of that day and of that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father [h]," &c. &c. In theſe paſſages Chriſt declares the words that he ſpake are not his own, that the works that he wrought are not his, but the Father's who ſent him, and that he of himſelf could do nothing; declarations utterly incompatible with the idea of his being really God. To ſuppoſe him to have been God and to have ſpoken in this manner, is to ſuppoſe him capable of deceit and prevarication; for, in that caſe, his works and words were his own, he could do every thing of himſelf, he knew to a certainty when the judgement-day ſhould come, and poſſeſſed inherently all poſſible fulneſs, without praying for it; for he that prays is always ſuppoſed to ſtand in need of what he prays for. If a man, in any important matter, was to trifle and prevaricate in this manner, he would be degraded, and juſtly loaded with contempt, and if it be ſo amongſt ordinary men, how could Chriſt exemplify the perfections of God, or be a pattern to the world of all purity, truth, and obedience, and have acted in this diſingenuous manner? But perſons who hold this doctrine and feel the force of theſe declarations of our Lord above cited,

c John x. 32.—d xii. 49, 50.—e viii. 40. xiv. 10.—f v. 19.—g xiv. 28.
h Mark xiii. 32.

and the very great difficulty of forming any thing like an anſwer, take ſhelter in a moſt unwarrantable aſſertion that they refer only to his human nature. We ſay unwarrantable, becauſe the ſcriptures make no ſuch diſtinctions, nor ever uſe any ſuch phraſes as his human nature or divine nature, and ſurely a ſubject on which they are ſilent is not to be regarded as ſound doctrine, and therefore the diſtinctions of his human nature and divine nature are fallacious, and to be regarded ſolely as a cunning invention of men. We know there are a great number of texts cited, and much ſaid upon them, to prove Chriſt to be God, but whether they will bear a comment more rational, more conſonant with the nature of things, and the tenor of ſcripture, is worthy of inquiry. We thought of noticing ſome of theſe, but found that doing this would lead us too far, beſides we could not ſay any thing more upon this ſubject, as has been already obſerved, that has not been already ſaid, and much more ably than we could pretend to do[a]. And as they are full and direct upon the ſubject, as lovers of truth we recommend them

[a] There are, however, two or three texts that are thought to ſpeak plainly that Chriſt is God, ſuch as "I and my Father are one." In ſcripture, God and his people are ſaid to be one, i. e. of one mind, or of one ſpirit, and Chriſt prays that his diſciples may be one with God, as he was one with him. Are they therefore gods? ſee John xvii. 20. "Know ye not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" The Saints are ſaid to be "the Temple of God," and that "God dwells in his Church," and that "his Church dwells in Him" Are they therefore gods? "He that hath ſeen me hath ſeen the Father." Surely this cannot allude to the ſeeing his perſon as a Jew; but that in ſeeing the miracles that Chriſt did by the divine power that dwelt in him, they ſaw the goings forth of God, or thus ſaw God manifeſting himſelf in Chriſt; and perhaps this is all that is meant by "God being manifeſted in the fleſh," i. e. in Chriſt, in this extraordinary way of working miracles.

with confidence to the attention of every inquiring mind, where, when they have ſeen the ſubject fully diſcuſſed, they then may judge for themſelves. In the mean-time we would caution every perſon not to be led away by ſounds and appearances, but to be careful to "judge according to truth;" for ſuppoſing that ſome ſcriptures prove Chriſt to have pre-exiſted, that is not proving him the only true God. Nay, farther, ſuppoſing ſome texts ſhould call him God, even that is far from being concluſive, when there is ſuch a maſs of evidence on the contrary ſide. The word *God* bears different meanings in ſcripture; men in authority, ſuch as princes, magiſtrates, and prophets, are there called gods; ſo that the real queſtion will be, Is Chriſt any where ſet forth as being the only true God? If not, then he only, like others before him, is called God in a ſecondary ſenſe. Take, for example, the account we have of Moſes being ſent into Egypt. "And the Lord ſaid, I will make thee a god unto Pharaoh." Would it not be prepoſterous for any perſon to conclude, that becauſe he was made as a god, could work miracles, and exceeded all that had been ſeen or heard of in the world before, therefore that he was really the true God who made all things; and this notwithſtanding he declared that it was the true God who ſent him, and delegated to him theſe powers for certain purpoſes? To us it is moſt evident that the ſcriptures refer all to God the Father in the firſt place, and to Chriſt only in a ſecondary ſenſe, as the means or inſtrument.

Did Chriſt come into the world? "God ſent him."—Did he perform miracles and wonders? "It

was by the power of God: they were the works of God."—Did he ſpeak as never man ſpake? "They were the words of Him who ſent him."—Had he power to lay down his life, and take it up again? "He had received this power from his Father."—Was he raiſed from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God? "It was by the operation of the power of God."—Is all power given unto him in heaven and in earth? "It pleaſed the Father that in him ſhould all fulneſs dwell"—So that whatever he was, or is, it is all from the power of God; and when all things ſhall harmonize in ſubjection together, "then ſhall the Son alſo be ſubject to him, and God be all in all."

The doctrine of the Spirit being God, or the Third Perſon in the Trinity, appears equally indefenſible, and what has already been ſaid will, in a great meaſure, apply to this. We find, indeed, that the ſpirit, or power of God, is ſometimes perſonified in ſcripture on account of its operations and the characters it bore, as that of comforter, advocate, &c. &c. but though thus ſpoken of as a perſon, ſtill it is far from proving that this perſon is the only true God. It is not unuſual for the ſcripture to perſonify things that have no real intelligence, no animate exiſtence, ſuch as the attributes of God, death, the grave, charity, &c. &c. If, according to this interpretation, we ſhould make them gods becauſe they are ſpoken of as perſons, what confuſion ſhould we introduce? There would be a Trinity of Trinities. To us, as men, the ſpirit of God ſeems as eſſential to his exiſtence as God, as the ſpirit of a man is eſſential to his exiſtence, as

a man; and, to talk of a man and his ſpirit being two men, is an abſurdity. We might here ſay much to the ſame purpoſe, but we haſten to obſerve, that the ſcriptures know nothing of the phraſes God the Son, and God the Spirit, nor yet of the notion itſelf; for Chriſt never once prays to God the Spirit, but always to the Father. What is the reaſon of this? Again, we never find the Apoſtles praying to either the Son or the Spirit; but why not, if they were God equal with the Father? Again, they never inſtruct the Churches to pray to any but to God the Father. All this is ſurely not to be explained but on the ſuppoſition that there is no god but the Father only. Here then we are left without either precept or example from ſcripture, a circumſtance which to the candid mind muſt come with irreſiſtible force. The Trinity is confeſſedly a myſtery that even its beſt friends can neither fully underſtand nor explain; yet, ſtrange to tell, the belief of it is made the gate of heaven, and they are ready to cry out, the ſcriptures are ſo plain that he who runs may read. The man that can run and read that a ſon is as old as his father, muſt be very quick-ſighted indeed. If he can upon ſober reflection believe this, and that three are one, and one is three, great is his faith; he is prepared to receive any thing which thoſe who may happen to be his Teachers may chooſe to impoſe upon him.

We ſay, then, with the Apoſtle Paul, "to us there is but One God, the Father," the Firſt Cauſe of all cauſes, the Maker of all things, the ſource of all perfection, and conſequently the only object of religious worſhip and adoration; for the very idea of a man's equally loving and worſhipping three

perſons is impracticable; one object will be ſupreme in his affections. It is certainly a ſerious thing to rob God of his peculiar honours: he is deſcribed in the Jewiſh ſcriptures as "a jealous God, who will not, and cannot give his glory to another." They then who worſhip a creature inſtead of their Creator, and who give themſelves no trouble to inquire whether it be right or wrong ſo to do, may one day, when it is too late, ſee the folly and impropriety of their conduct. It is a ſtrange miſtaken notion that men ſhould think they pay reſpect to Chriſt by aſcribing to him honours which do not in truth belong to him, and which he no where requires at their hands. They would bring more real honour to his name by obeying his goſpel in truth and ſimplicity, and by joining in the ſpirit thereof, to worſhip his God and our God, his Father and our Father, in ſpirit and in truth, agreeably to his own words: "Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve."

Your's, &c. &c.

LETTER VIII.

DEAR FRIEND,

WE have endeavoured in our obſervations on the leading doctrines of religion, now commonly received as Chriſtianity, to ſhew plainly our reaſons for abandoning the popular ſyſtems; and though from what has been ſaid our preſent ideas in a great meaſure may be gathered, yet we think it neceſſary to give, in a ſtill plainer and more explicit manner, our views of the faith and practice of the goſpel.

We, like others, believe it to be good news unto men, and to conſiſt chiefly in God's bleſſing the world with the revelation of his will, in granting them repentance unto life, the forgiveneſs of ſins, the hope of an endleſs exiſtence in another and a better world, by a reſurrection from the dead. This could not fail of proving to men, in a ſtate of ſin and death, good news or glad tidings; and in order that man might enjoy the intended love and goodneſs of God in the goſpel of his grace, it was found neceſſary to prepare him for it by ſhewing him his need of it, and his helpleſs condition without it. To this end the law was given as a ſchoolmaſter till the Seed or Chriſt ſhould come, for "by

the law is the knowledge of sin[a]," (and not by the inward work of the spirit) and the law was added, that the offence might abound, and that sin might appear exceedingly sinful; that man, being exhibited to himself in all his weakness, might be able to see, that by the works of the law, or, in other words, his own rectitude, that no flesh could be justified before God[b]. It is true in the very nature of things, that impure services can never be satisfactory to a holy and a just law; here all the world was found guilty before God; "he had concluded all under sin, that he might have mercy upon all[c]," for sin and death had completely separated man from his Maker[d]. By no efforts he could make, could he redeem his soul from death in this situation; he was without hope, all his fairest prospects were bounded by the grave, and swallowed up in death.

Without this necessary knowledge, man could not be disciplined, could not see the beauty of the gospel, nor sensibly enjoy the mercy of God. In this lost condition did the gospel find and consider the world, and brought to man the best news that could possibly reach his ears, viz. that he should not be lost in death, but live again, and that for ever; that God was his friend, the God who made him, and against whom he had offended, and who, as an evidence and pledge of his love, "had given his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth and obeyeth his gospel should not perish, but have everlasting life." Man is here spoken, or appealed to, as a reasonable creature, as a creature of motives, and called upon to enjoy all this good by sincere obedience to the will of God; and this call is enforced,

[a] Romans iii. 20.—vii. 7.—[b] iii. 20.—[c] iii. 23.—[d] xi. 32.

on the one hand, with an aſſurance of being bleſſed hereafter with greater felicity than can be conceived of in this life; and, on the other hand, by the moſt awful ſanctions of inconceivable future puniſhments. Men could not obey, with all their hearts, without ſincere repentance, on account of their former ſinful purſuits; hence it is, that "men are every where called upon to repent." This is one of the firſt ſubjects inſiſted upon by the New Teſtament writers: John the Baptiſt began his miniſtry by preaching repentance; our Lord began his miniſtry by preaching repentance; Peter began his miniſtry by preaching repentance; Paul preached that "men ſhould repent and turn to God:" all from the powerful conſideration of a righteous judgment to come, in which "every man ſhould be rewarded according to his works." By all which is plainly meant, that men ſhould turn from evil to good, from all idolatrous worſhip, and the ſervice of falſe gods, to the ſervice and worſhip of the true God, who made all things. Religious people ſeem, in general, to have very imperfect ideas of repentance; for when a man begins to be ſeriouſly concerned about religion, and is much diſtreſſed for fear of being damned, inſtead of leading him to the word of God, to the mercy and forgiveneſs that is there revealed for ſuch characters, they tell him to pray and wreſtle with God till he obtain the bleſſing, and, by way of encouragement, aſſure him that the Lord has begun a good work in him; that the Spirit is working conviction and a ſpirit of repentance, and is ſhewing him the ſinfulneſs of his nature, and the corruption of his heart, and that, by and by, this godly ſorrow will work in him ſuch repentance as

need not be repented of. It is true, godly ſorrow leadeth to repentance, and, in moſt caſes, is the companion of it, but ſorrow is not repentance. There may be much ſorrow and ſadneſs, and no real repentance. Real repentance is the turning from one thing to another; and in religion it is the turning with all the heart from falſhood to truth, from the power and ſervice of ſin to the ſervice of God, and to the practice of virtue and benevolence. It is a real change of heart and manner of proceeding, the entire adoption of new habits and of new purſuits. No man can reap the fruits of repentance, except a door or way of acceptance be opened to him by the Being againſt whom he has offended. A man in a ſtate of death cannot turn to life without a way of life be opened to him. This, amongſt other mercies for which we have to thank God, is given in the goſpel. This glorious diſpenſation gives man an opportunity of turning unto God, and of enjoying a hope of life. Chriſt "is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance unto Iſrael, and forgiveneſs of ſins;" and not to Iſrael only, but alſo to the whole world. Hence the Apoſtle Peter exclaimed, when he ſaw the Holy Spirit deſcend upon Cornelius and his friends, who were Gentiles, "Then hath God alſo unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Many ſerious people think Chriſt was exalted to grant repentance by the ſpirit working inwardly upon the heart, whereas it is plain that nothing of the kind is intended by the text, but merely that the goſpel given by Chriſt, and now eſtabliſhed by the endowing the Apoſtles with power from on high to preach it,

grants unto the Jews, notwithſtanding their wickedneſs and ill treatment of the Meſſiah, mercy and repentance, and gives all men, notwithſtanding what they may have been before, an opportunity of turning unto God, with an aſſurance of his favour and protection, if they obey him. It ſeemed to us proper to make theſe obſervations on repentance, leſt we ſhould be miſunderſtood, and we ſhall now purſue our remarks on the faith and practice of the goſpel.

The faith of the goſpel, in the firſt inſtance, is to believe Jeſus of Nazareth to be the Chriſt, or Meſſiah. This is clearly the firſt great truth that Chriſt and his Miniſters called upon the world to believe. And the fitneſs and reaſonableneſs of this meaſure moſt evidently appears; for whatever good the goſpel contains, no man, as a rational agent, could enjoy it, without he believed it with an honeſt mind. Upon this, all depends; for if we truly receive him as the Great Meſſenger of God, we of courſe receive his meſſage; and the man who ſincerely believed and obeyed him as ſuch, was conſidered by the Apoſtles as a Chriſtian or a Diſciple, whether he knew much or little. This, were it needful in this place, we could fully ſhew from various paſſages in the New Teſtament. Indeed all the mighty works that were done by Chriſt and his Miniſters were to give ſufficient evidence of this great truth, namely, that we might believe that "Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name[a]." The phraſes "believe on the Son of God," "believe in the goſpel," or "in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt," or

[a] John xx. 31.

"in the truth," do not mean that if men believe in a ſuperficial, or ſimply in an hiſtorical way that Chriſt is the Meſſiah, (juſt as they believe that there were ſuch men as Moſes, Solomon, Cromwell) that therefore they ſhall be ſaved, without paying reſpect or pure obedience to him as ſuch, by no means. A traditional, diſtant acknowledgment, or a mere nominal belief of Chriſt being come in the fleſh, certainly is not what is meant by the faith of the goſpel, for this men in general do, without regarding it, or deriving any advantage from it[a]. On the contrary, the ſcripture ſenſe of the words "to believe in Chriſt," &c. is to receive and obey him as the Meſſiah with all our hearts, to be influenced and guided by him as King of the Chriſtians, and Head of the goſpel diſpenſation. This appears to us the true ſenſe of the terms "believing in Chriſt," or in the goſpel, and which belief only hath the promiſe of eternal life. The news of a life or world to come, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs, could of itſelf yield little or no ſatisfaction to ſinful man, more eſpecially when he is aſſured that "nothing unclean can enter there," "that without holineſs no man can ſee the Lord." And indeed it muſt ever be true that there can be no fellowſhip betwecn purity and impurity, light and darkneſs,

a It is worthy of remark, the very great difference that there is between believing in a man and in his doctrine. We may eaſily believe in the former, and through ignorance, or the bias of ſyſtems, reject the latter; a ſtriking inſtance of which we have in the conduct of the Jews; for while they boaſted in being the diſciples of Moſes, yet they made his doctrine, or the law, of no effect by their traditions. They thought they were walking in the light, when they ſtumbled in darkneſs, and knew not whither they were going. This, we are afraid, is too faithful a likeneſs of the profeſſing chriſtian world.

truth and falſhood, between God and the unclean ſinner, as ſuch. Hence the propriety of our Lord's words to the Jews: "If ye die in your ſins, where I am, there ye cannot come." But when God in the riches of his grace, amongſt other mercies, declared to his offending creatures the forgiveneſs of ſins, then every bar, every impediment to their happineſs on his part was removed. They then could joy in God, and rejoice in hope of a life to come. This is one of the grand doctrines of the goſpel miniſtry, and what makes the goſpel to be truly glad tidings to the heavy ladened and the burdened mind, the fulfilment of the New Covenant God had made with his people: "I will be merciful to their unrighteouſneſs, and their ſins and iniquities will I remember no more [a]."

The Apoſtles preached this good news to the world, declaring the remiſſion and forgiveneſs of ſins in the name of Jeſus, as he himſelf informs them, ſaying, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Chriſt to ſuffer, and to riſe from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remiſſion of ſins ſhould be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jeruſalem [b]." Paul tells the Corinthian converts that "God was in Chriſt, reconciling the world unto himſelf, not imputing their treſpaſſes unto them [c]." Yes, without any reſtrictions, without any exceptions. That ſhould we ſuppoſe the ſin of the world ten thouſand times greater than it was, or ſhould we ſuppoſe the ſins of the whole world, laid upon the head of one man, if God declared by his Miniſters that he would re-

[a] Hebrews viii. 12.—[b] Luke xxiv. 47.—Acts xiii. 38. —
[c] 2 Cor. v. 19.

member them no more, would not impute them to him, but would cleanſe him from all guilt in his mercy (the only way by which ſin is removed) if he turned unto him and obeyed his will; the man complying with theſe conditions, and repoſing the fulleſt confidence in what God declares, would feel juſtified before him, and in his own conſcience, as much as though he had never ſinned. We might here eaſily illuſtrate our meaning by ſuppoſing a great part of the ſubjects of this kingdom in open rebellion againſt the laws and their rightful Sovereign, in which caſe ſhould his Majeſty be pleaſed in his clemency to iſſue an act of grace to all his rebellious ſubjects offering them a full and free pardon for all offences, on conditions that they lay down their arms, ſurrender themſelves, and return to their allegiance within the time limited, all that complied with the ſpirit of the conditions would be as free and as much under the protection of the laws as though they had never ſinned againſt them.

Religious people, unhappily for themſelves, have too much forſaken the fountain of living waters, inſtead of taking advantage of the act of grace that God has proclaimed to mankind by Jeſus Chriſt, and relying ſtedfaſtly on his veracity therein. Their Teachers endeavour to ſhew them that they are ſinners, and labour to convince them of the neceſſity of obtaining pardon, or they will ſuffer the dreadful conſequences of their ſins. So far very good; but their peace and pardon is not drawn from the act of grace publiſhed in the goſpel, but from ſenſible communications of the ſpirit to the mind. To attain theſe, they are ſet to ſeek, to pray, and wreſtle, and to attend upon means, earneſtly pray-

ing God to give them to know that he loves them, that he has pardoned their ſins, &c. by the witneſs of the ſpirit. This work of uncertainty frequently continues a long time, wherein the greateſt anxiety is felt and endured, before they receive the ſuppoſed bleſſing, and ſome, with all their labour, never ſatisfactorily acquire it. How different is this from the Apoſtles' plan! They not only teach men the neceſſity of receiving pardon, but alſo declare it to them. They do not direct men to the round-about way of praying, ſeeking, wreſtling, and attending upon means, with a peradventure they will receive it this time or that time, but offer them a preſent good, ſo that they have nothing to do but to receive and rejoice in what is freely given them of God.—To illuſtrate this ſubject. Suppoſe a man under ſentence of death for a capital offence againſt the laws of his country, is there not the greateſt difference between one perſon's attempting to convince him of the neceſſity of ſeeking and obtaining a pardon, or he will ſurely be executed, (a truth of which he is already convinced) and that of a ſecond perſon, who ſhall declare a free pardon in his ears? While the former perſon only makes him more ſenſible of the deſperateneſs of his ſituation, and ſtirs him up to ſeek with tears and a heavy heart, by the means of friends, for that pardon, which he is quite uncertain whether he ſhall attain or not; the latter, by declaring a free pardon to him, and ſhewing it to him, ſigned and ſealed, fills him with a preſent good that diſpels all his doubts, removes condemnation and the fear of death from his mind, and fills it with peace and rejoicing.

In a religious ſenſe, the ſame happy experience is enjoyed by a ſinner, who is affected with his ſituation, on receiving the ſcripture doctrine of the forgiveneſs of ſins; it not only delivers him from fear and condemnation, but generates in him every ſentiment of liberty, gratitude, and rejoicing, and every affection that can enable him to ſerve and worſhip God in ſpirit and in truth. He loves God becauſe God firſt loved him; love begets love, goodneſs begets goodneſs. In a word, he is affected deeply by the divine perfections, and irreſiſtibly drawn to admire and imitate them. We repeat it with confidence, that the doctrine of the remiſſion of ſins being received and enjoyed by faith, prepares the mind for every good word and work, and generates in him every principle of love to God, and goodwill towards man. He that believes this, hath, in truth, the witneſs in himſelf. Inſtead of bondage and condemnation, as above noted, he has liberty and rejoicing; inſtead of fear and diſmay, a well-grounded hope; inſtead of a fearful apprehenſion or looking-for of vengeance, he has the faireſt proſpects, and the moſt enlarged expectation. In ſhort, he is a new man, and it is his pleaſure to walk worthy of him who has called him to virtue and glory.

That a ſinner ſhould eſtabliſh himſelf in habits of rectitude for a courſe of time, or that he ſhould ſeek by prayer and crying, for months or years, for marks and ſigns, or inward evidences of the ſpirit, before he can lift up his heart with pleaſure or confidence to God, ſeems to us perfectly unſcriptural; for before either of theſe can be effected, as both require time, he may be taken from the land of the living: of courſe theſe views do not meet the

preſent wants and condition of man. That a man ſhould have ſome aſſurance of his life before he can do any thing that requires much time, is an objection that never could be brought to the Apoſtles' doctrine. Let any man carefully examine their preaching to the world, and he will find they never ſet men to wait or ſeek for any thing which the ſpirit had yet to work or to do; no, their cry was to this purpoſe, "to-day if ye will hear his voice." In ſhort, they always offer men a preſent good, ſuitable to their ſinful condition. They had not by prayers to "bring Chriſt down from above," or to "bring him up from the deep;" the "word was nigh them, even in their hearts; and in their mouths." The word of faith, which the Apoſtles preached, that if they "believed in Chriſt with their hearts, confeſſed him with their mouths, and obeyed him in their conduct, they were aſſured of being ſaved[a]," and which thouſands received with joy whilſt hearing the Apoſtles preach, for they wanted nothing as a preparative, but to underſtand what they heard[b]. We hope we ſhall not be underſtood as meaning to inſinuate any thing againſt virtue, rectitude, and prayer; no, we regard them as of the firſt importance; we only mean them to be conſidered as the effects, and not the cauſe of our receiving the mercy of God; neither do we mean that a man may have been very wicked, and a ſlave to the luſts of a corrupt mind the greater part of his life, and that being made ſerious by affliction, or the fear of approaching death, and under the influence of theſe circumſtances praying to God to have mercy on him, or that by receiving ſacraments, hearing prayers,

[a] Romans x. 7, 8, 9.—[b] Acts iii.

or by believing, that he can be changed and converted into a ſaint in a moment. This is not what we mean. We have been merely ſtating how men were made Chriſtians at firſt, and not ſpeaking of their conduct as Chriſtians. If a man, as a Chriſtian, ſins, and commits iniquity, he muſt waſh out his ſins by unfeigned repentance and contrition; he muſt confeſs and forſake them with all his heart, or he cannot have the favour of God; and although we incline to think that ſincere genuine repentance at any period of life will be accepted, yet we are fully ſatisfied that to let the right ſeaſon of improvement paſs away unemployed, and to truſt to a death-bed repentance for future happineſs, is trifling, deluſive, and dangerous to the laſt degree; for however any man may wiſh or hope to die, his death may be ſo ſudden, or attended with ſuch painful circumſtances as to exclude every opportunity of effecting ſuch an important work.

We have obſerved already that the forgiveneſs of ſins, and the hope of life and happineſs in another world, is enjoyed only by faith: we come now to ſhew what faith is.—To have faith in any thing is ſimply to believe or credit that thing to be truth. To have faith in Chriſt, is to believe and receive him as the true Meſſiah, the Son of God, and to rely or confide in what he has ſpoken to be the truth of God. The words *faith* and *believing* mean juſt one and the ſame thing, and they are uſed in ſcripture indiſcriminately for this purpoſe. For inſtance: "Being juſtified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt[a]." Again,

[a] Romans v. 1.

the ſame Apoſtle ſays, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins; and all that believe are juſtified from all things from which they could not be juſtified by the law of Moſes [a]." In the firſt paſſage they are ſaid to be juſtified by faith, and in the ſecond by believing, which ſhews that the Apoſtle uſed them as ſynonimous terms. Faith is ſometimes put for the goſpel itſelf; but, as touching our ſubject, faith or believing is the ſame in all caſes: whether we call it human or divine faith, the difference ariſes ſolely from the nature of the thing believed, and not in believing itſelf. If we believe in human teſtimony, that may be called human faith; if we believe in divine teſtimony, that may be called divine faith. So that to credit or believe the goſpel of Chriſt to be the truth of God, is true and ſaving faith.

Thus having ſhewn what faith is, and as we have before proved that it is not a gift, we ſhall now ſhew how it is received.—To us it appears moſt evident, both from ſcripture and reaſon, that faith cometh by hearing, and in all caſes depends upon evidence, and the credibility of attendant circumſtances. We cannot believe in any report till we hear it; and when any report is ſounded in our ears in which, if true, we are greatly intereſted, our firſt inquiry is, Is it true? If there appear ſufficient evidence of its truth, we of courſe believe it. Thus the Apoſtle Paul: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God [b]." The Apoſtle could not be ſo inconſiſtent with himſelf as to teach, in one epiſtle, that faith cometh by hear-

[a] Acts xiii. 38—[b] Romans x. 17.

ing, and in another that it is a gift. This would be ſuch a contradiction in terms and ideas as would ill accord with the harmony of truth and the Apoſtle's character. Some perſons, feeling the force of this difficulty, rather than give up their unſcriptural tenet have endeavoured to make both theſe ſtatements ſpeak the ſame thing, very aukwardly indeed, as all muſt do who attempt to reconcile contradictions. But the ſcripture language of faith coming by hearing, and hearing coming by the preaching of the word of God, and depending on evidence, is perfectly agreeable with all our rational principles, and with the experience that is felt and acted upon amongſt mankind, who generally believe and act from evidence in all their common concerns with one another. God, who is gracious, and conſiders our frame, has condeſcended to treat us according to our circumſtances and capacities, and has made uſe of means and terms correſponding thereto, and has called us to believe nothing but upon the cleareſt evidence. Thus our Lord appeals to his miraculous works, to the evidence which he gave, and calls the Jews to believe on him for "the very works' ſake," telling them, that "if he had not done the works which no other man did, then had they been without ſin[a]," i. e. if the miracles which he wrought among them had not proved that he was really ſent from God, they would have been guiltleſs in not receiving him as their expected Meſſiah. When our Lord had left this world, his Apoſtles ſucceeded him in preaching the goſpel, and were endued with power from

[a] John x. 38.—xiv. 11.

on high to work ſimilar miracles [a], in confirmation thereof; and they, like their Maſter, appeal unto their works, that they had given the ſigns of an Apoſtle [b]. Paul tells the Churches that "their goſpel came not unto them in word only [c], but in power and demonſtration, that their faith might not reſt upon the word of men." The Writer to the Hebrews expreſſes himſelf thus: "How ſhall we eſcape if we neglect ſo great ſalvation, which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by our Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God alſo bearing them witneſs both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will [d]." But if faith does not come by hearing, and does not depend upon evidence, to what purpoſe were all theſe wonders? What was this great evidence of miracles for? If faith is the gift of God, the work of the Spirit upon the heart, it was not needful, and we think upon this ſuppoſition that no man can ſhew any great uſe in miracles or preaching. But as preaching is the ordinary means that God has appointed to ſave men, we ſee the wiſdom and abſolute neceſſity of theſe evidences, as without them no preaching could have affected the mind. That men were ſaved by preaching, by hearing, and by evidence, plainly appears from the following paſſages: "Thou haſt the words of eternal life." "Ye are clean through the word." "As many as gladly received his word." Cornelius, though he had had a viſion, and heard an angel, yet was ordered to ſend for Peter, who ſhould tell him words by which

[a] John xiv. 12.—[b] 2 Cor. xii. 12.—Acts ii. 43.—[c] 1 Theſ. i. 5.—[d] Heb. ii. 4.

he and his houſe ſhould be ſaved. The Bereans "received the word with all readineſs." The Corinthians "heard and believed." The Theſſalonians "received the word, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which alſo worketh effectually in all that believe." Paul was "not aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt, for it was the power of God to ſalvation to every one that believeth." "The preaching of the Croſs to them that periſh was fooliſhneſs, but to them that were ſaved, the power of God, and the wiſdom of God." "It hath pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs (or means) of preaching to ſave them that believe." "The word is nigh thee, the word of faith which we preach." "So we preached, and ſo ye believed." "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the goſpel which I preached unto you, which alſo ye have received, and wherein ye ſtand, and by which alſo ye are ſaved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unleſs ye have believed in vain," &c.

Here is ſuch a maſs of evidence that men were ſaved by believing, or outward teſtimony by the means of preaching, and not by any inward work of the Spirit, that we are utterly aſtoniſhed how ſerious honeſt men can read the ſcriptures and not ſee that this was the means which God made uſe of to ſave the world—preaching, ſupported by evidence. As the ſcheme of ſalvation is recorded in the ſcriptures, the ſcriptures are the light of men: without them we know little of God, nothing of a world to come, or of our future deſtiny. They are the only ſource of information in matters of religion. Of what vaſt importance then are the ſcriptures to us, and what is equal to a true rational

underſtanding of them! How ought they to be reverenced and obeyed, as they only are capable of making us wiſe unto ſalvation! Impreſſed with theſe ſentiments, how painful is it to hear ſerious people, through the influence of falſe and miſchievous notions, ſpeak of the ſcriptures as *a ſealed book*, *a dead letter*, *the bare word*, *only ink and paper*, &c. &c. which evidently proves the prejudice and weakneſs of their minds in religious concerns. They would not talk in this manner about an Indenture, an Act of Parliament, a Bank Note, or a Royal Proclamation. What ſhould we think of that man who ſhould maintain that a Royal Proclamation paſted againſt a wall was only a dead letter, inſignificant ink and paper, and not to be depended upon, unleſs efficaciouſly applied by ſome foreign power? Has it not the ſame ſpirit and force paſted upon the wall? Is it not as obligatory as if we had heard his Majeſty ſpeak it himſelf in his Cabinet? If the Proclamation then contains the ſpirit of its author concerning the matter of which it ſpeaks, in the ſame manner as every book (let the ſubject be what it may) contains the ſpirit of its author, when we receive the book, and approve of it cordially, believing what it contains, we receive its ſpirit, and become of the ſame mind with its author. In like manner, the ſcriptures contain the ſpirit and mind of God, and as far as we receive them, and they have a dwelling in our hearts, ſo far do we receive his ſpirit, and become of one mind with him.

We cannot but think, notwithſtanding great profeſſions and apparent ſanctity, that it is a very irreverent manner of ſpeaking to call the words of

Eternal Truth, the living words of the Living God, a dead letter. It reflects no credit on a man's ſanctity, or on his acquaintance with that book, as may appear from the following ſcriptures: "Thou haſt the words of eternal life." Our Lord ſays, "My words, they are ſpirit and they are life." Paul ſays, "The word of God is quick and powerful, ſharper than a two-edged ſword," &c. and he thanks God that the Theſſalonians received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, "which worketh effectually alſo in them that believe." Peter tells the Churches that they were "born again, not of corruptible ſeed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." When perſons who aſſert that the ſcriptures are a bare word, a dead letter, &c. read ſuch paſſages as theſe, "that the word is the power of God to ſalvation to every one that believeth," what can they honeſtly think or ſay? Need any man heſitate a moment which he is to regard? Is it not plain that they neither underſtand nor believe theſe ſcriptures?

We might here remark how much ſome very religious people expoſe themſelves by the incoherence of their notions. It is very common to hear them ſtrenuouſly contending for the inſpiration of the ſcriptures; but ſhould this be taken for granted, and it be argued from thence their ſufficiency to ſave without any thing elſe, they then change their ſtrain, and affirm that they are a dead letter. Again: It is common to hear them paſs all the fine encomiums upon the ſcriptures that they can expreſs, and, amongſt others, that they are ſimple and eaſy to be underſtood, ſo that "he who runs may read."

Here ſhould we take up their own argument, and affirm that they are ſo plain, and ſo well adapted to the meaneſt capacity, that every attentive mind may be fully able to underſtand and enjoy all the good they hold out, and to comprehend all the truths neceſſary to ſalvation, they then again change ſides, and contend that it is a ſealed book, and cannot be ſavingly underſtood but by ſupernatural aſſiſtance. Can any conduct be more inconſiſtent? Paul ſolemnly charges Timothy, before the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, to preach the word. But what great good could the preaching of a dead letter do then, more than now? What good effects could be produced by the bare word? The common reply is, It is powerful when the ſpirit accompanies and applies it to the ſoul, or opens it to the mind. We ſeriouſly aſk any man what ſcriptural authority he has for talking in this manner? When and where is the ſpirit and the word ſeparated? If the word of God is quick and powerful, and the power of God unto ſalvation to every one that believeth; if the words of Chriſt are ſpirit and life, when is the ſpirit and word aſunder? To this queſtion the greateſt advocates for the work of the ſpirit, in the popular ſenſe, will find themſelves not a little puzzled to return a ſcriptural anſwer. Extraordinary as it may appear, it is nevertheleſs true, that the warm advocates for the ſpirit ſtrongly reſiſt the ſpirit, by depreciating the word of God, in which it dwells, and by which it ſpeaks unto men. It is here they oppoſe the ſpirit, as might clearly be ſhewn from the ſacred volume, and from which we ſhall give an inſtance or two. "God ſpake unto the fathers (not inwardly, but) by the Prophets." "Holy

men of old ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt;" and the Jews, who rejected the Prophets, and hearkened not to their words, are charged with reſiſting the ſpirit. Nehemiah in his prayer to God confeſſes, "Yet many years didſt thou forbear them, and teſtifiedſt againſt them by thy ſpirit in thy Prophets." Thus Stephen tells the Jews: "Ye ſtiff-necked and uncircumciſed in heart and ears, ye do always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt." "As your fathers did, ſo do ye; which of the Prophets have not your fathers perſecuted?" &c. In latter days God ſpake unto the world by his Son, and his Son by his Apoſtles, who were baptized with the ſpirit, that they might be Ambaſſadors for Chriſt, and able Miniſters of the New Covenant, for they were appointed to teach unto men the way of ſalvation. It is by rejecting their words that men reject the counſel of God againſt themſelves, for all who reject the Apoſtles do as much reſiſt the ſpirit as the Jews did when they rejected the Prophets. Whether men do not in reality reſiſt the ſpirit when they declare the ſcriptures (which contain it) a dead letter, a ſealed book, and thus in fact of no effect, we leave to the candid enlightened mind to judge.

But it is objected, if we affirm that attention to the ſcriptures is the only means of ſalvation, we make void prayer and the aſſiſtance of the ſpirit, and repreſent them as of no uſe. We anſwer, No. We only deny that they make men Chriſtians, by working faith in them, &c. for it is only the Chriſtian that is encouraged to pray, or is aſſured that his prayers will be either heard or regarded, and to ſuch it is the higheſt privilege. There are a number of circumſtances in

human life, ſuch as trials, afflictions, temptations, &c. &c from which the ſcriptures, although they may greatly ſupport us under them, yet do not propoſe to deliver us. In reſpect of theſe, God does what he pleaſes. By prayer we worſhip and adore the one living and true God as the great ſource of all perfection, and the Firſt Cauſe of all things, more eſpecially for the gift of his Son and the hope of eternal life. We acknowledge our entire dependence upon him, and offer him, with the deepeſt gratitude, our beſt ſacrifices of praiſe and thankſgiving for the countleſs mercies we enjoy. By prayer we beſeech God to enlarge our minds, that we may be able to comprehend more of his fulneſs, and of that love which paſſeth knowledge: that we may know more of what is the hope of our calling, and the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the ſaints, and ſee more clearly "what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to usward who believe." We pray that he would help our infirmities, and aſſiſt our endeavours to conform to his will; that he would ſave us from evil, and pardon our ſins. This is one of the peculiar excellencies of the goſpel diſpenſation; the ſpirit of which is a ſpirit of favour and mercy. A broken law admits not of repentance; but here, if any man ſins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous.

What a mercy it is that frail and erring men, in all circumſtances, can, by ſincere repentance, come unto God with confidence, and find mercy and acceptance at the throne of grace. Theſe are ſome of the uſes of prayer, and to which may be added, the good effects that the due exerciſe thereof has upon the pious mind, which, however, we conceive do

not conſiſt in ſenſible communications, or rapturous feelings; and this repreſentation of the nature and uſe of prayer by no means militates againſt the ſcriptures being able to make us wiſe unto ſalvation, though, by the very religious, called a bare word; but happy had it been for the Chriſtian world if they had confided in, and contented themſelves with the bare word of God, inſtead of loſing ſight of truth and common ſenſe in the numerous ſubſtitutes and experiments they have made uſe of, and particularly in that labyrinth of error, the ſuppoſed work of the ſpirit, a fathomleſs gulph that alike ſwallows up both ſcripture and reaſon, and where all is wildneſs or deſpair. By the word of God the worlds were made, and all things are ſtill upheld by the word of his power, and the bare word of God will ſtand and ſhall endure, when heaven and earth are paſſed away; when all theſe unwholeſome notions are gone to their own place, and are loſt in eternal darkneſs.

The man who draws all his hopes and conſolation from the word of God, and builds upon that alone for eternal happineſs, builds upon a ſolid and immutable foundation that will reſiſt all the ſhocks and viciſſitudes of mortal life, and be able to ſtand the teſt in the day of trial, when the ſandy foundation of enthuſiaſtic frames, and all the feelings of a heated imagination, with all the erroneous notions of men, ſhall ſink with the tempeſt, and vaniſh away like a midnight viſion, or a morning dream.

Thus, to the beſt of our power, have we complied with your requeſt We have ſpoken but briefly of our religious difficulties and of our preſent

ſentiments; however, from what we have ſaid, it will ſufficiently appear how different our views are from the opinions of thoſe who do not properly draw their hopes and conſolation from the conſideration of the ſcriptures being the true hiſtory of the revelation of God unto men, but from their own agreeable marks and frames, or the ſuppoſed evidences and manifeſtations of the ſpirit to their minds. Hence it is, that when they meet they are conſtantly inquiring of each other how they feel? What is the ſtate of their ſouls? What the Lord has done for them? Do they feel him precious? &c. &c. A foundation that muſt be as changeable as the wind, for our frames or ſenſations riſe or fall, are pleaſant or unpleaſant, in a great degree, according to our exertions, or to local and conſtitutional circumſtances. However deſirable happy experience may be, the partial want of it cannot ſhake the confidence, nor alter the foundation of him who ſtands upon the ſcriptures, for "the word of the Lord endureth for ever;" "and this is the word which by the goſpel is preached unto us," ſo that nothing in nature, in life, or death, can affect the Chriſtian's hope, if he maintain a converſation becoming the goſpel.

If the ſcriptures then be true, if Chriſt be riſen from the grave, and be now at the right hand of God, Chriſtians are ſafe; they ſhall be like unto him. This is the ground of our hope, here we have nothing to fear, nothing remains for us to do but to to be ſteadfaſt, immovable, and to abound more and more in the work of the Lord, for herein we are aſſured that our labour ſhall not be in vain. We ſhall now conclude by obſerving briefly what

our ſtate of Connection is, and how we conduct ourſelves as a religious Society.

Our numbers are not great; we may amount at preſent to one hundred and fifty, or thereabouts. Of theſe ſeveral are reſident in the Country in different places, but particularly at Hull, where one of our friends, very reſpectable both for his abilities and character, is gone to miniſter. Beſides theſe, we have loſt many by death, and ſome have gone away from us. However, even here it is ſome conſolation to us that few, if any, have hitherto turned away on account of our doctrines being conſidered by them untrue. This was not their plea; the cauſe has generally been their own impropriety of conduct.

Reſpecting our manner of conducting religious worſhip[a], you will recollect that we have made no mention of any ſettled Miniſter ſince we parted with *Lady Huntington*'s. The very unſettled ſtate of mind that pervaded the Connection at that period, prevented any farther engagements. From that time to the preſent the Society is indebted to the labours of a few of her own Members, but more abundantly to the unwearied exertions of him who is now their Miniſter, to whoſe zeal, perſeverance,

a We ought to mention the extreme embaraſſment we felt in uſing the common collections of hymns which ſo conſtantly expreſs ſentiments contrary to the ideas we had now received, and though we tried to ſelect the moſt unexceptionable, yet this expedient failed to give complete ſatisfaction. This circumſtance ſuggeſted the notion of attempting to make our own, though greatly unqualified for ſuch an attempt, being almoſt ignorant of the rules of poetry; notwithſtanding which, we compoſed a number of hymns upon our own principles, many of which we continue to uſe in manuſcript, and which ſtill afford us ſatisfaction; and though there may be in them poetical or grammatical errors, yet theſe, even to a refined ear, cannot be ſo diſagreeable as the frequent expreſſion of ſentiments at which the heart revolts.

and prudent management, the Connection is under every obligation, and whoſe memory they will ever deſervedly reſpect and cheriſh when he is no more; when his ſenſibility cannot be offended by that honeſt tribute of reſpect which we cannot refrain from paying to his character, without hurting our own feelings, when ſpeaking of thoſe circumſtances in which he was the principal actor for a number of years.

We have already hinted that we formed ourſelves into a Body upon Primitive Principles, and that we have no rules of diſcipline but ſuch as we found in the New Teſtament. We perceived, both from theory, obſervation, and experience, that neither order, propriety, nor purity of character, as a Body, could be maintained, in any proportionate degree, without diſcipline. A pure creed and a pure worſhip, however right in themſelves, ſeem not ſufficient. A practical obſervance of the ſcripture injunctions appears requiſite to form the complete character of a Chriſtian Church. Indeed there are many injunctions which cannot be attended to properly but in this collective point of view, ſuch as loving, exhorting, admoniſhing, warning one another, rejoicing and ſympathiſing with one another, &c. all which implies connection and action. However perfectly a compoſed mind may hear or dwell on certain ſubjects, or with whatever pleaſure it may indulge in grand and uſeful contemplations, and make progreſs therein in private meditation, let theſe thoughts only be applied to the concerns of active life, where many differences of ſentiments and proceedings occur, which of courſe affect the temper, and the difference between theory

and practice will be felt and known; a fact that may teach us this very important leſſon, that a character formed by practice knows more of itſelf what it can do or bear, and alſo more of others, than what a character formed principally by ſyſtem can attain to: of courſe this laſt is not ſo excellent. But even ſhould we not ſtand in need of aſſiſtance from others, (a caſe ſomewhat rare) yet if others ſtand in need of aſſiſtance from us, the obligation is equally ſtrong; and though, in ſome inſtances, cloſe connection may not be approved of, yet, upon the whole, it is evident there are advantages to be enjoyed, and good to be done in fellowſhip, that are not to be found and attended to any where elſe; and it is very obſervable, that where diſcipline is not attended unto, that either there is exhibited a diſtant unaffecting appearance, not at all equal to that intereſt which is felt where perſons conſider themſelves united together as brethren, members of one another, and of the body of Chriſt, or there appears to be, and is found ſuch a mixture of oppoſite and improper character as cannot be reconciled to the ſpirit and practice of the goſpel: thus eſpecially it is, and ſo it muſt be, in all national eſtabliſhments. With the beſt attention it will be impoſſible to remove every defect from a ſociety made up of imperfect creatures. This is not to be expected; but in a body of people where there are all ſorts of diſpoſitions, placed in very different circumſtances, ſuſceptible of very different impreſſions, it will be found impracticable to maintain a character at all worthy of their calling, without diſcipline, operating upon the juſt and moderate principles of truth and utility in reſpect of all, without

diſtinction of intereſt, or privilege of character. There are ſeveral obvious reaſons why diſcipline has fallen into diſuſe; amongſt others, are the following: The bad uſe that has been made of it, and the wicked purpoſes for which it has been applied. By many it is not underſtood; it is no part of their concern; they do not ſee the utility of it: nay, by ſome the very term is diſliked, they not being perhaps ſufficiently able to diſtinguiſh between the mild and wiſe diſcipline of the ſcriptures and that of the Star Chamber and the Eccleſiaſtical Courts, not to mention that diabolical perverſion of every thing human and divine, the deteſted Inquiſition, all founded on the pretended authority of ſcripture. Again: It ſo ill accords with the ſuperficial diſtinctions of ſociety, the rich do not like to be conſidered, in any reſpect, as being on a level with the poor. Moreover, it is utterly repugnant to the falſe ideas of honour and good breeding which prevail; for, notwithſtanding all the profeſſions of attachment to virtue that may be made, even by the better ſort of people, honour is with them before humility; they ſeem to forget that we are all equally dependent creatures upon God, and that in religion and the grave there is no real diſtinction. It muſt be confeſſed, however, that the poor have contributed their ſhare by uncouth manners, and by preſuming too much on thoſe who, in every other reſpect, are their ſuperiors, taking the moſt improper advantages of their religious privileges.

Our method of acting, in reſpect of diſcipline, is ſimply this: If one member knows that another has been overtaken in a fault, it is his duty to endeavour to reſtore ſuch a one in the ſpirit of meekneſs.

If he has been guilty of criminal conduct, he is ſeriouſly to tell him of it by himſelf; if the offending brother hear him, "it is well he has gained his brother." If he hear him not, then he is to take another or two with him, to reaſon with him; if he hear them, it is well. Here it is ended, and the offence is remembered no more; but if he hear them not, then it is told to the Church. If the offender hear the Church, it is well, all is ended. If he hear her not, then he is ſeparated, and becomes "as an Heathen man and a Publican." However, this only takes place when there is an evident violation of moral and religious duty; and after allowing conſiderable time for ſerious reflection, in all theſe caſes endeavours are made to impreſs the minds of both parties that the voice of the Church in her government and diſcipline is the voice of God, as far as ſhe acts conſiſtently with truth; ſo that any perſon ſeparated from her lies under the juſt diſpleaſure of God, till he repents of the ſin committed. This was the practice of the Apoſtles and the Firſt Churches, and what is enjoined upon all Churches that walk by the New Teſtament. This practice we adopt not by any authority of our own, but as members of the Apoſtolic Church; for while we govern ourſelves by the rules, and conform to the practices which the Apoſtles laid down, we do not think that diſtance of time produces any ſeparation; but, acting upon the ſame principles with them, we regard ourſelves as of the ſame body. This conduct tends to correct groſs characters and practices, and to maintain that order, peace, and harmony which are ornaments to any body of

people poſſeſſing them. All ſelfiſh, arbitrary, and partial conduct being directly contrary to the character and principles of the Apoſtles, can never be admitted by any who conform to their rules, and are true members of the Church which they founded. Had this order of the goſpel been practiſed with only moderate ſucceſs, what a very different appearance would the Chriſtian world have exhibited! What crimes would have been prevented, which have unhappily diſgraced the Chriſtian name! But wearied with a taſk to which, from various reaſons, we were unequal, but which we have executed in the beſt manner circumſtances would allow, we now ſubmit the whole to your peruſal, from whoſe cultivated mind and goodneſs of heart every allowance is expected, of which truth and propriety will admit.

Your's, with the greateſt conſideration,

D. EATON.

SUPPLEMENT.

EVERY intelligent Reader will eaſily perceive that the Author of this work has written up on the Principles of Materialiſm, and that the people here ſpoken of reject the popular doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul. But leſt this ſhould not appear ſufficiently clear, we think proper to be more explicit upon it, and to give ſome reaſons for rejecting it, as we have done with reſpect to the other ſubjects.

In the firſt place, we do not find it revealed in ſcripture. Moſes no where mentions it to the Jews. It forms no part of the law, and in the goſpel diſpenſation we are told that "God only hath immortality in himſelf[a]." Secondly, we conſider it to be philoſophically falſe. We ſee nothing in man but what is liable to decay. We carefully examined the Moſaic account of the formation of man, which reads thus: "God made man out of the duſt of the earth, and breathed into his noſtrils the breath of life, and man became a living ſoul[b]." Before this infuſion of life, he was a lifeleſs maſs, and if the breath of life was withdrawn, (as was the caſe) he would be juſt the ſame lifeleſs clay he was be-

a 1 Tim. vi. 16.—b Gen. ii, 7.

fore. No other ſenſe of the paſſage can be admitted without violating the meaning both of the words and ſpirit of it.

It is farther to be obſerved, that this paſſage does not ſay that God breathed into his noſtrils an immortal ſoul, as numbers do unwarrantably aſſert, but "the breath of life, and man *became* a living ſoul." This breath of life put the organs into motion, and conſtituted him what he was, a living man. Upon this principle only can we ſee any propriety in the ſentence paſſed upon Adam, "duſt thou art, and unto duſt ſhalt thou return." For what loſs would Adam, or any other good man have ſuſtained by the death of the body, if he poſſeſſed an immortal ſoul that would enjoy greater happineſs without it, when the ſentence ſhould take place? By this means, inſtead of its proving an awful ſentence, it would be a real bleſſing

From a review of this paſſage, which is the moſt pointed upon the ſubject, it appears ſo far from proving man immortal, that it plainly aſſerts that he is wholly conſtituted of matter, animated by ſpirit, or life; and few, we imagine, will be ſo abſurd as to argue that this life was intelligent before it was communicated to man. However, ſhould any attempt this, they will labour under ſuch difficulties as they will find, upon conſideration, hard to obviate; for, in the firſt place, we ſay God poſſeſſes certain attributes, amongſt which immortality is one. If it is conſidered intelligent, why not the reſt intelligent alſo? And to conſider the different attributes of God as ſo many ſeparate intelligent perſons, all dwelling in one Being, preſents an idea to our minds pregnant with the greateſt confuſion.

Secondly, the ſame arguments that we brought to prove the breath of life in man intelligent, equally applies to the brute creation, for it muſt be obvious that all have the ſame breath; for, philoſophically ſpeaking, nothing leſs than life can animate any living creature. Indeed this the ſcripture repeatedly aſſert, that "we have all one breath [a]." The difference then between a man and a beaſt lies not in the breath, or life, but in the conſtruction and organization of their frames. For who in oppoſition to facts will contend that a beaſt has the ſame intelligent ſoul as a man? Yet, revolting as this concluſion may appear, it is nevertheleſs the unavoidable conſequence of proving life intelligent [b].

However unimportant this ſubject may appear to others, to us it is not a matter of curioſity or amuſement, but of the laſt importance, for here only have we hope of life after death; a circumſtance that renders revelation doubly precious to us. The great point under conſideration is, Whether a life to come is ſet forth under the idea of man poſſeſſing an immortal ſoul, or by a reſurrection from the dead.—The rule by which we judge of every doctrine is this: When the ſcriptures are ſilent upon it, we look upon it as ſufficiently refuted. Now upon the former of theſe opinions, the immortality of man, the Chriſtian as well as the Jewiſh ſcriptures are wholly ſilent; not ſo upon the doctrine of the reſurrection. On this the Apoſtles founded all their arguments of a world to come, and from this alone

[a] Eccleſ. iii.—Gen. vi. 7.

[b] What is here ſaid will ſufficiently reply to all that may be urged from thoſe two or three texts that ſpeak of the "ſpirit, or life, returning to God who gave it;" if it is not intelligent, it, like every thing elſe, returns to its ſource.

they raiſed hope and expectation in their adherents and repreſent it to us as the only hope of a future life. Peter tells the Churches that "they were begotten again to a lively hope by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead," or (as ſome render it) to the hope of living again. Paul ſays, "If Chriſt be not riſen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is alſo vain." Again, "If there be no reſurrection of the dead, then they that have fallen aſleep in Chriſt have periſhed." "If the dead riſe not, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die[a]."

It appears from Paul's expreſſions here, as well as the reſt of his writings on the ſubject, that he had no expectation of living again, if the doctrine of the reſurrection was not true. Had Paul believed the notions ſo commonly held in theſe days concerning immortality, this language would not have eſcaped him. What! give the reins to lawleſs inclination, give free licence to depraved taſte and corrupt appetite, to indulge in every licentious exceſs, to the deſtroying of every virtuous and moral principle, if the immortal ſoul was at the ſame time accountable to God, and would enjoy happineſs, or ſuffer puniſhment, according to their conduct in this life, independent of a reſurrection? Such language is utterly unworthy of the Apoſtle. All the promiſes of the goſpel, made unto the faithful in Chriſt Jeſus, have their conſummation in his "ſecond coming, without ſin unto ſalvation." Our Lord tells his diſciples, "if he goes away, he will come again and receive them unto himſelf," not a word of their enjoying happineſs until that period. Paul, when he was going to be offered

[a] 1 Cor. xv.

up, ſpeaks on this wiſe: " I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of rgihteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them alſo that love his appearing." Here Paul had no idea of wearing his crown before the day of righteous retribution. We might here, if it was neceſſary, tranſcribe a great part of the New Teſtament to illuſtrate our ſentiments, to prove that life and immortality are only brought fully to light by the reſurrection of Chriſt from the dead; for they evidently contraſt this doctrine with the fall, ſhewing that what was loſt to man by the firſt Adam, was regained in the ſecond Adam, " as in Adam all die, ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Chriſt, the firſt fruits, afterwards they that are his at his coming," and not when they die.

We have found that whenever favourite principles are attacked, or diſputed, men generally have recourſe to dark ambiguous paſſages to ſupport them. This is neither ingenuous nor wiſe. " Every one who doeth or ſeeketh the truth, cometh to the light." When any doctrine requires to be ſupported by doubtful or miſapplied paſſages, it cauſes every thinking perſon to ſuſpect its truth. We are not ignorant of the objections that are raiſed, nor of the paſſages that are brought againſt this doctrine, the ſtrongeſt of which are the following: The thief upon the croſs petitioned, " Lord, remember me when thou comeſt into thy kingdom." Our Lord replied, " Verily I ſay unto thee, to-day ſhalt thou be with me in paradiſe." It does not

appear here that the word paradiſe means reſt in death, for this, to the thief, was granting no favour, that he would have had without praying for it; nor can the paſſage mean that they went that day to heaven, becauſe the ſcripture ſpeaks to the contrary, namely, that Jeſus was "three days in the heart of the earth[a]," and from what the Lord himſelf ſays to Mary, "Touch me not, for I am not yet aſcended to my Father," &c. &c. It is ſomewhat curious that people ſhould contend that here he immediately aſcended up to heaven, and at the ſame time believe in what is called the Apoſtles' creed, that "he deſcended into hell, and the third day only roſe again." Here their faith and their creed are certainly at variance.

The ſenſe of the paſſage appears to us this: Verily I ſay unto thee to-day, (i. e. I promiſe thee this day of my humiliation) thou ſhalt be with me in paradiſe. This reading of the paſſage ſeems conſiſtent with the whole of the account, and does no violence to the text, only removing the ſtop.

The caſe of Lazarus is generally allowed to be a parable, and indeed it cannot be read otherwiſe: "carried into Abraham's boſom" is a parabolical expreſſion; beſides, it is not ſaid that the ſoul of Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's boſom, but Lazarus himſelf: likewiſe the rich man was buried, and in hell he lift up his *eyes*, not his ſoul, and prayed that Lazarus might be ſent to dip his *finger* in water to cool his *tongue*, which are members of the body. Theſe expreſſions render it impoſſible to conceive of it otherwiſe than a parable, and parables never can be interpreted lite-

[a] Mat. xii. 40.

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The transfiguration of Chriſt is adduced to the ſame purpoſe, when Moſes and Eliſas talked with him. This is merely arguing from inferences, and betrays a very ſuperficial acquaintance with the ſubject; for when they came down from the Mount Jeſus charged them that "they tell the VISION to

[a] Mat. x. 28.

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[a] Mat. x. 28.

no man." We think no ſober mind would wiſh to lay any great ſtreſs upon viſionary evidence.

The laſt objection that we ſhall notice is ſome particular expreſſions of the Apoſtle Paul. "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilſt we are at home in the body, we are abſent from the Lord." "We are confident, I ſay, and willing rather to be abſent from the body, and to be preſent with the Lord[a]." The ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks in ſimilar language to the Philippians: "For I am in a ſtrait betwixt two, having a deſire to depart and to be with Chriſt, which is far better[b]." When theſe expreſſions are candidly conſidered in their connection with the chapter, they will be found to bear a very different meaning. In the chapter from which the former of theſe quotations is ſelected, he ſays, "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be ſwallowed up of life." When can mortality be ſwallowed up of life but at the reſurrection, when "this mortal ſhall put on immortality." And to this event the Apoſtle evidently carries the ſubject; "for (ſays he) we muſt all appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt." Add to this the trying circumſtances in which Paul was placed: to uſe his own words, in want and neceſſities of every kind, and forced to labour night and day; not only perſecuted by the Heathen, but in danger from falſe brethren, with the weight of all the Gentile Churches upon him.—Amidſt theſe trials, if we admit the poſſibility of his becoming "a caſt-away," as his own words to the Corinthians imply, where is the impropriety of his

[a] 2 Cor. v. 6, 8.—[b] Phil. i. 23.

deſiring a ſafe and ſecure retreat? for "bleſſed are the dead who die in the Lord." That he could not deſire to lie ſo long in the grave, and be ſeparated from that enjoyment which he ſo ardently longed for, ariſes from not conſidering that there is no ſpace between death and life, and that to all appearance the reſurrection will be as inſtantaneous as the ſoul going to heaven, according to the common notion. The very circumſtance of God raiſing his Son from the dead ſtrikes at the root of this favourite ſentiment, for while his riſing and aſcenſion into heaven ſealed the truth of his doctrine, it fully proved to the world, by theſe inconteſtible evidences, that God had provided a kingdom, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs and eternal life, an evidence that was not needful for this purpoſe, if the ſoul was immortal and could enjoy greater happineſs without it, if it be true, as ſome contend, that the body is a clog to its enjoyments. The ſcripture informs us of perſons being brought to life again that were dead, yet upon none of theſe occaſions is there any mention made of immortal ſouls, which, according to the common notion, muſt have been either in a ſtate of happineſs or miſery, and muſt have been recalled from thence to their old habitations; and if the ſoul thus recalled was in a ſtate of happineſs (which muſt be the caſe of a good man) inſtead of being raiſed from the dead proving a bleſſing, it muſt have proved juſt the reverſe, in being called from a ſtate of unmixed happineſs to the troubles and miſeries of this life, ſubject once more to the pains of affliction and death. This doctrine moſt evidently forms no part of revelation, but is alto-

gether of Heathen extraction. What could induce the Chriſtians to admit it into their creed we know not, but it appears to have been done without proper conſideration. for it even deſtroys ſome of the favourite popular ſentiments.

If man is conſidered as poſſeſſing an immortal ſoul, he muſt either receive it at the birth, or in the womb, or otherwiſe it muſt come by generation, a fourth way cannot be thought of. If the firſt of theſe be admitted, it deſtroys the favourite notion of hereditary corruption. Few will argue that God breaths corrupted ſouls into men; whatever comes from God muſt be pure. If the latter, then the doctrine of immortality falls to the ground, for it is an inſult upon common ſenſe to ſuppoſe that a corrupt mortal can engender immortality. This is not the only abſurdity to which the doctrine leads: it ſuppoſes that the ſouls of men, which have been ſuffering the torments of hell for thouſands of years, will hereafter be brought out to take their trials; likewiſe that thoſe which have been enjoying happineſs as long, will be brought out to receive their rewards. The judgment-day is one of the greateſt events that the ſcriptures record, yet this ſuppoſition renders it perfectly uſeleſs, not to ſay trifling. If it do not make the reſurrection void, it greatly leſſens its conſequence, in as much as it promiſes future life independently of this.

The doctrine we are now combating has given riſe to enormous evils. In the dark ages of Popery the ſanctified Hypocrite and mercenary Prieſt alike availed themſelves of this principle to impoſe upon the minds of their ſervile devotees the groſſeſt frauds and impoſitions. They taught them that the de-

parted ſouls of the ſaints were ever attentive to their decéaſed bodies, and that they attended thoſe with a guardian care who venerated and reſpectfully treated their relics, till this notion ſo greatly prevailed that people only thought themſelves ſafe from dangers and evil influences as they poſſeſſed ſtore of holy relics, conſiſting of rotten bones, the profeſſed remains of eminent ſaints. This gainful trade was ſo gratifying to the avaricious Prieſts, that they took care to procure a plentiful ſupply, for rotten wood or bones were almoſt as good to them as ready money, till nearly as much old wood was diſpoſed of in this way, ſaid to be of the Holy Croſs, as would have made croſſes for nearly half the people of Jeruſalem.

To this may be added, the doctrine of purgatory, the invocation of ſaints praying to dead men, &c. ſlaviſh ſuperſtitions, whoſe natural tendency was to debaſe the mind of man, and to fill him with low unworthy notions of a merciful God. But for this ſentiment, none of theſe evils could have exiſted; take it away, and the doctrine of purgatory, and all its wretched conſequences, crumble to the duſt. Beſides all this, it is the ſoul of infidelity; for while the Deiſt has ſo much reaſon to believe in the doctrine of immortality, he will pay little regard to the ſcriptures. Take away this falſe prop, and he muſt either receive their teſtimony concerning a life to come, or he muſt wander in ignorance and total darkneſs in a matter that ſo much concerns the happineſs of man, for there is nothing in nature that tells him he ſhall live again. The continual uncertainty of what ſhall be his future deſtiny would prove a continual ſource of anxiety.

The pleaſures ariſing from a well-grounded hope of future happineſs

Muſt never gild his gloomy cell,
Nor cheer his drooping head;
He knows not whether he ſhall dwell
In life, or with the dead.

But the ſorrows and evils incident to human life are of ſuch a nature as to require ſomething more ſubſtantial and ſatisfactory than the dark and intricate ſpeculations of bewildered imagination.

We have given our thoughts but briefly upon this ſubject, and for the ſake of that brevity we muſt conclude, we know it is hard to remove deeply-rooted prejudice from the minds of men, which has been ſanctioned by ages, learning, and authority; yet what is here ſaid may excite the mind to inquire into the propriety of its faith, for it is an evident truth that people in general believe more from tradition than from conviction, or ſcripture authority. What has been ſaid may ſerve, we hope, to ſhew that man is dependent upon God for life in this world, and that which is to come; whereas the immortality of the ſoul makes uſeleſs the grandeſt doctrine of the ſcriptures, *a reſurrection from the dead*, and renders man, as far as a future exiſtence is concerned, independent of God, for he cannot *die:* in leaving this world he only changes his place of exiſtence.

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THE END.

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